

Monday, 19 October 2026

(10.00 am)

SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Could you remain standing for a moment, Dr Abbott. You will need to take the oath.

DR PETER ABBOTT (sworn)

Questions by MR MOSS

SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Yes, Mr Moss.

MR MOSS: Thank you, sir. Dr Abbott, good morning. Just start by giving us your full name, if you would.

A. My name is Peter Abbott.

Q. Thank you. If we can have on screen your statement, please, it is CAB000003. We see page 1 there. There's one matter we just need to deal with which arose over the weekend. Could we go, please, to paragraph 44, which is on page 12 CAB000003_0012, and we see there that there was a reference -- in the version of the statement that you signed, there was a reference to an exhibit which was wrong and we have dealt with that over the weekend by super-imposing the correct reference, which is CAB000044.

Can I just check, given that's a change to your signed statement, that you are content that that's the correct document?

A. I am.

Q. Thank you. Then, if we can go to page 67 CAB000003_0067

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at page 6, paragraph 23, within Dr Abbott's statement, paragraphs 23 all the way through to 39, give the details of this.

Dr Abbott, as you will understand, I just want to pick out some of the key details this morning, so that we have a fair background. So if we start on paragraph 24 CAB000003_0006, you say that:

"The Cabinet Office's role is to set out on the Government's website. It has responsibility ..."

Then, most relevantly I think, to us:

"(a) supporting collective government, helping to ensure the effective development, coordination and implementation of policy."

Then:

"(b) supporting the National Security Council ..."

Then there is a reference to another body which is redacted:

"... coordinating the government's response to crises and managing the UK's cyber security."

Then, over the page CAB000003_0007:

"(c) promoting efficiency and reform across government through innovation, better procurement and project management, and by transforming the delivery of services."

Now, I don't overlook (d), (e) and (f), but would it

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please, Dr Abbott, we will see that you signed this statement on 29 September of this year and with that correction, are the contents of this statement true to the best of your knowledge and belief?

A. They are.

Q. Thank you. If we can go back, please, to page 1 CAB000003_0001 and just paragraph 1 you explain there, Dr Abbott, that your role, is this right, is as Deputy Director for Counter Terrorism and Serious and Organised Crime in the National Security Secretariat within the Cabinet Office?

A. That is correct.

Q. Thank you. You also tell us, in terms of a very brief resume, and I am sure I'm not doing justice to it, but you previously worked in the FCDO, then for the Office for Security and Counter Terrorism in the Home Office.

You had experience relevant to our work in one of the early reviews of Prevent and in your role currently with the Cabinet Office, in formal terms, I think you are on loan to the Cabinet Office; is that correct?

A. That is correct.

Q. Thank you. Against that brief background, can we turn, please, to the first topic I want to explore with you, which is the Cabinet Office's role in Government in general terms. And, sir, for your reference, if we look

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be right that those first three are probably the most relevant to the Cabinet Office's work on VFIs after the Southport attack?

A. Yes, that's correct.

Q. Thank you. In paragraph 25, you explain -- and obviously this will be intimately familiar to you and familiar to many others, but we ought to set the context:

"The Cabinet Office sits at the centre of government fulfilling a coordination role, supporting and advising the Prime Minister and Cabinet Office Ministers, and facilitating Cabinet and collective decision-making across government."

You also say:

"As such, it monitors the delivery priorities of other departments and ensures they remain on track, while also brokering disagreements and building consensus on policies with other Government departments, who in turn have relationships with their respective stakeholders."

That sense of the Cabinet Office monitoring the delivery priorities of other departments, is that always the case across the board or is it only in particular areas in which the Cabinet Office takes a particular interest?

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1 A. I think it is in those areas where we take a particular
 2 interest. It is not sort of every single Government --
 3 area of governance work, but on those that the Cabinet
 4 Office has decided to treat as particular priorities.
 5 Q. Thank you. You assist with that towards the bottom of
 6 the same paragraph, 25, where you say:
 7 "The decision as to how and to what extent the
 8 Cabinet Office supports or challenges departments is
 9 always a matter of judgement. Ministers and senior
 10 officials use a range of factors -- for example
 11 political direction or ministerial priorities -- to
 12 decide where the centre may need to engage more closely
 13 in the work of departments."
 14 So when is the Cabinet Office viewed as best suited
 15 to driving policy as opposed to leaving it to perhaps
 16 a lead department?
 17 A. I think in the vast majority of cases it is always the
 18 lead Government department that would take the policy
 19 lead, but there are circumstances where the Cabinet
 20 Office might play an enhanced role, working closely with
 21 that lead Government department, to assure progress, to
 22 increase the pace if the pace is needed to be increased,
 23 or in some other way to coordinate and that is
 24 particularly the case where there may be a large number
 25 of Government departments involved in a particular area

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1 with His Majesty's Treasury?
 2 A. It sits purely with His Majesty's Treasury in
 3 consultation with the lead Government department.
 4 Q. You then, helpfully, in your statement with a summary of
 5 key bodies within the Cabinet Office, if we can look at
 6 that briefly. So paragraph 26, the National Security
 7 Council, which you explained:
 8 "... is chaired by the Prime Minister, is the main
 9 forum for collective discussion of the Government's
 10 objectives for national security."
 11 Is that right?
 12 A. That is correct.
 13 Q. Then you have mentioned it already, but if we go over
 14 the page, please, CAB000003_0008 paragraph 28, you have
 15 got the National Security Secretariat, and you explain
 16 that that is:
 17 "... responsible for the coordination and collective
 18 agreement of national security and foreign policy
 19 issues."
 20 Is that right?
 21 A. That is correct.
 22 Q. It is led by two deputy national security advisers who
 23 support the national security adviser and the National
 24 Security Council. Yes?
 25 A. Yes.

7

1 that requires a greater than usual amount of
 2 coordination.
 3 Q. In broad terms -- and we will come to the detail of the
 4 involvement of the Cabinet Office in the VFI problems
 5 and issues, but what was the driver for the Cabinet
 6 Office having that involvement? You say, for example,
 7 political direction or ministerial priorities. What was
 8 it that led the Cabinet Office to have a role in this at
 9 all?
 10 A. So it was very clear from the outset that the Southport
 11 attacks represented a very, very high priority for the
 12 Prime Minister and for ministers in general. That was
 13 the case immediately after the attack but also very much
 14 the case at the beginning of 2025 when the Prime
 15 Minister gave his speech setting out that the Southport
 16 attacks should represent a line in the sand and that was
 17 very much the start of the Cabinet Office's and the
 18 National Security Secretariat's role in driving forward
 19 that policy.
 20 Q. In general terms -- again, we will come onto the way in
 21 which the Home Office in particular flagged the
 22 restraints of the spending review, as it saw it was
 23 constraining viable options. Does the Cabinet Office,
 24 when it does become involved, have a role in unlocking,
 25 if necessary, further funding or does that sit purely

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1 Q. And I think we are redacting his name, but I think one
 2 of the two deputy national security advisers had
 3 a particular role in relation to the VFI issues, yes?
 4 A. That is correct.
 5 Q. Thank you. Then if we look at paragraph 30, you explain
 6 that within the Cabinet Office there's also the Economic
 7 and Domestic Affairs Secretariat, responsible, as you
 8 have set out there for "supporting collective agreement
 9 across economic and domestic policy" areas. You will
 10 correct me if I'm wrong, should we therefore understand
 11 that in addition to national security aspects, when one
 12 is getting, in VFI terms, to issues like local
 13 authorities, education, health care and how they
 14 interface on VFIs, is that typical of the sort of issues
 15 that would fall within the Economic and Domestic Affairs
 16 Secretariat within the Cabinet Office?
 17 A. Yes. So particularly at the start of this process, the
 18 National Security Secretariat worked very closely with
 19 the Economic and Domestic Affairs Secretariat, but it
 20 was primarily treated as a national security issue and
 21 so, therefore, NSS, took the lead, reverting to EDS
 22 where necessary.
 23 Q. Thank you. And that too has a coordinating function,
 24 EDS, it can convene meetings between departments to
 25 resolve disagreements and agree actions?

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1 A. That's correct.

2 Q. An element of knocking heads together, in layperson's

3 parlance?

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. Thank you, and then there's also -- just note the

6 heading if you would, which we need to navigate around.

7 So there is a heading there which gives the name of

8 a Cabinet Office body and then if we go over the page,

9 you explain that this Cabinet Office body:

10 "... provides data and analytics services to ...

11 other Cabinet Office secretariats to support the

12 development of policy."

13 Yes?

14 A. That is correct.

15 Q. Just to make the link, because yours is obviously

16 a separate statement, this, I think, is the same Cabinet

17 Office body which Mr Emmett detailed in his evidence

18 last week as having had a significant involvement in

19 early work, including on the definitions of VFIs, is

20 that right?

21 A. That is correct.

22 Q. If I have understood your paragraph 31, Dr Abbott, one

23 of the things that you stress about this is that this

24 Cabinet Office body does not generate its own organic

25 data. As I have understood it, it pulls in available

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1 I'm not going to cover the July 2024 to

2 January 2025, the immediate post-attack period, I want

3 to pick it up after AR's conviction.

4 So for that, if we can go to page 13 CAB000003_0013,

5 paragraph 46. You say there that:

6 "Following AR's guilty plea and a short trial ...

7 the [then] Prime Minister and Home Secretary announced

8 a substantial package of immediate policy work."

9 You refer to the speech in Downing Street. You have

10 mentioned that once already this morning; that is the

11 "line in the sand" statement, yes?

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. Thank you, and if we can have on screen, please,

14 CAB000042, Sticking with the immediate post-conviction

15 stage. We can see from the top that this is a meeting

16 of 29 January and it is not a ministerial meeting but we

17 can see that it is a very senior meeting of officials,

18 chaired by the then Cabinet Secretary, is that right?

19 A. That is correct.

20 Q. One sees, again, in terms of the seniority of attendees

21 for this Southport follow-up Cabinet Office meeting,

22 that there were I think no less than five Permanent

23 Secretaries from the Home Office, MHCLG, Department for

24 Education, DHSC, as well as the Ministry of Justice?

25 A. That is correct.

11

1 data either from open source or for other Government

2 departments or scientific data and analyses them. It is

3 not creating its own data?

4 A. No that is correct.

5 Q. Yes, thank you very much.

6 So, having set out, I am sure in overly simplistic

7 terms, the structures, can we turn now to a second topic

8 which is to look at the Cabinet Office's early work in

9 coordinating VFI policy. So if we can go to page 9

10 CAB000003_0009, paragraph 35, you explain there, that:

11 "Following the Southport attack and throughout the

12 subsequent work on VFIs and NIEV, the Cabinet Office's

13 role has principally been exercised through [the

14 National Security Secretariat], and led by Deputy

15 National Security Adviser ..."

16 Then the name is redacted. So that's why I asked

17 you just to confirm that there was a named individual

18 who was principally involved, yes?

19 A. That's correct.

20 Q. Thank you. So this section of Dr Abbott's statement,

21 again, just for your note, runs all the way through to

22 page 9, paragraph 93. Dr Abbott, we are grateful for

23 you and your team for the detail in this statement. You

24 will understand that I want to focus on some of the key

25 points but there is a lot of detail in your statement.

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1 Q. So at officials level, really -- my paraphrase -- but

2 the top of the office, from the big players of the

3 Government departments?

4 A. Absolutely.

5 Q. Thank you. If we go to paragraph 1, please. It says:

6 "The sentencing ..."

7 You will understand, we are referring to the

8 perpetrator as "AR", so:

9 "The sentencing of [AR] on 23 January has brought

10 into stark relief the current policy gap of how to

11 address the growing cohort of mainly young men, fixated

12 with violence, but absent a clear ideological

13 motivation; thus, falling outside the legal definition

14 of terrorism and the well-established state response."

15 It may seem an obvious question but what was it,

16 following the sentencing of AR, that led to this very

17 early recognition that it had given stark relief to the

18 current policy gap?

19 A. So I think it was an understanding that this represented

20 something of a new phenomenon that we hadn't, in the UK

21 at least, experienced something like the Southport

22 attack before. I think it also brought into relief the

23 difference between the structures and experience that we

24 have had in this country with regards to terrorism and

25 the differences with that, that we were facing a new

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1 threat, that we were not set up, at that stage, to
2 effectively grapple with.
3 And I think the large number of different
4 departments, as you said, represented by the very top of
5 their respective offices, illustrates the -- from the
6 start, the complexity of the problem that we were faced
7 with.

8 **Q.** Thank you. A theme that I'm going to want to explore at
9 various stages with you is obviously the extent to which
10 what's described here as "the current policy gap" has
11 been closed, or that some measures had been taken to
12 close it but we will explore that as we go through.

13 Paragraph 2:

14 "Addressing this complex issue will require a new
15 and joined up policy approach between relevant
16 departments and agencies to identify the appropriate
17 response to this emerging trend."

18 It was pointed out that:

19 "This work will involve a broad spectrum of
20 cross-cutting and interlocking challenges beyond the
21 traditional counter-terrorism architecture including
22 mental health, technological, and educational and
23 understanding how current established pathways for state
24 intervention and coordination will need to be adapted to
25 respond to the threat."

13

1 Secretaries on Wednesday ..."

2 That seems to be a reference to the meeting that we
3 were looking at a moment ago, is that correct?

4 **A.** Precisely, yes.

5 **Q.** Then it is referring to a forthcoming National Security
6 Council meeting on 11 February, which was going to
7 consider this issue. So, this is starting to plan the
8 work going forward. Could we have the "Next steps"
9 section on the page, please.

10 So:

11 "To inform the long-term approach, three strands of
12 analytical work will be taken forward ..."

13 I think the first of those was:

14 "An assessment of the size, profile and trajectory
15 of the VFI cohort ..."

16 Yes?

17 **A.** Correct.

18 **Q.** Secondly:

19 "An assessment of the vulnerabilities and triggers
20 present in these VFIs ..."

21 Thirdly:

22 "Analysis of 'what works' [well] in addressing the
23 problem ..."

24 So that looks like looking at what interventions
25 work best, yes?

15

1 Then if we could toggle down just a little bit so
2 that we have the actions across the screen. I'm not
3 going to go through all of these at this stage but it is
4 right from quite early on, isn't it, that there was
5 an identification of very challenging work going to need
6 to be done across several Government departments? So,
7 for example, one sees in point 3, that the Home Office
8 was going to have to work with the DfE to expand and
9 accelerate what was already, I think, plans for the
10 Young Futures Prevention Partnerships, correct?

11 **A.** Yes.

12 **Q.** And on point 4:

13 "Home Office and Ministry of Justice to work with
14 [the] Cabinet Office to consider options to align the
15 Southport Inquiry with the Nottingham Inquiry ..."

16 Shared secretariats and awareness of things coming
17 up from other inquiries as well. So that gives the
18 flavour of that. I wonder if we could turn next,
19 please, to CAB000041. If we just have the top third of
20 the page. This is dated 31 January 2025. Do you see
21 that there?

22 **A.** Yes.

23 **Q.** From the second paragraph, please correct me if I have
24 got this wrong, where it says:

25 "The Cabinet Secretary convened Permanent

14

1 **A.** Correct.

2 **Q.** Then:

3 "These will inform the detail of how this work is
4 taken forward, between Prevent and wider [Home Office]
5 work including the Young Futures programme."

6 Just pausing there. I asked Mr Emmett about this.
7 Is the early emphasis on Young Futures programmes -- is
8 that because that was thought to be the most fruitful
9 and likely candidate for taking forward -- a vehicle for
10 taking forward further work, or is that something of
11 a hot issue at the time because that was being worked on
12 anyway?

13 **A.** I think it was probably a bit of both. We were quite
14 conscious, even at the start, of the difficulties
15 involved in Prevent taking on more and more of these
16 cases, a subject I know that you have looked at in some
17 detail in this Inquiry, and we wanted to explore other
18 vehicles that might be suitable outside of the counter
19 terrorism space and as you say, at the point that we
20 were taking forward these conversations, the Young
21 Futures programme, and the prevention hubs that were
22 associated with it were very much a live issue and we
23 wanted to explore that.

24 **Q.** Thank you. Then the other aspects that we get from
25 this, just looking at the next two paragraphs, there was

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1 a recognition, no doubt perfectly realistic, that it was
 2 not possible to establish all of this in time for
 3 a February NSC meeting. So there was going to be
 4 a proposal showing:
 5 "... short-term changes whereby Prevent takes on
 6 more casework ... while a more lasting response is
 7 developed."
 8 Do you know what the reference to Prevent taking on
 9 more casework was actually about? We have heard about
 10 the surge, post-Southport, in referrals. But what was
 11 intended that it might take on as a greater casework?
 12 **A.** I understand this most likely relates to the Prevent
 13 pilots that were announced at the end of December, which
 14 were looking at some of the questions around thresholds
 15 and guidance.
 16 **Q.** So the thresholds review and perhaps the below
 17 thresholds review. We should not read that as changing
 18 the thresholds for entry into Prevent and Channel
 19 support; that's about more work on cases being done
 20 rather than accepting more referrals? Is that right?
 21 **A.** Yes.
 22 **Q.** Thank you, and then flagged up from early on, we see it
 23 in the next paragraph, was this emphasis on DSIT -- or
 24 the department formerly known as DSIT -- which was being
 25 commissioned to "accelerate work more ambitious options

17

1 **Q.** And it must follow that outputs from the NSC as action
 2 points should be prioritised accordingly in terms of
 3 their importance?
 4 **A.** That's correct.
 5 **Q.** So, if we go down to paragraph 58 CAB000003_0016, in
 6 preparation, I think, for this meeting, you say that:
 7 "The work undertaken during the early part of 2025,
 8 resulted in the paper prepared by [the National Security
 9 Secretariat], entitled counter terrorism and Violence
 10 Fixated Individuals ..."
 11 Is that right?
 12 **A.** Correct.
 13 **Q.** So if we can have that, please, on screen please, it is
 14 CAB000030. Sir, for your note, there is a summary of
 15 these at paragraph 49 and 50 of Dr Abbott's statement
 16 but I'm going to go to the paper itself.
 17 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Thank you.
 18 **MR MOSS:** So just sticking with the title page, we see the
 19 reference to "Violence-Fixated Individuals" papered by
 20 the NSS and it is circulated for the attention of the
 21 meeting on 25 March. It may not matter, but was it the
 22 case that, in the end, discussion of this got pushed
 23 back to the March meeting rather than the February
 24 meeting?
 25 **A.** That is correct.

19

1 for managing online safety".
 2 We see this time and again, don't we, in the early
 3 papers that -- my words -- getting tough in that area
 4 was being flagged from the centre as needing priority?
 5 **A.** That is correct.
 6 **Q.** Thank you. Could we go then, please, to page -- back to
 7 your statement -- page 15 CAB000003_0015. Paragraph 56.
 8 So you say:
 9 "In early 2025, it was agreed that a planned meeting
 10 of the NSC to discuss ..."
 11 Then there is a reference to other matters that were
 12 going to be discussed, I think, which we don't need to
 13 go into:
 14 "... should be expanded to include consideration of
 15 VFIs."
 16 Then:
 17 "As set out above, the NSC is the Government's main
 18 forum for taking national security decisions at
 19 Ministerial level."
 20 Now, in general terms -- and we are going to come to
 21 this meeting obviously and the detail in the actions
 22 arising from it -- but from the nature of what the NSC
 23 does, it is obviously one of the most important and
 24 senior forums in Government, would you agree?
 25 **A.** I would.

18

1 **Q.** That seems to be the case, thank you. Then if we go
 2 over the page, please, to page 2 CAB000030_0002, on
 3 paragraph 2 we see that one thing that was being
 4 emphasised was that there were concerns that the cohort
 5 represents a growing problem, yes?
 6 **A.** That's correct.
 7 **Q.** Where was that derived from, that sense; can you
 8 remember?
 9 **A.** My understanding is that that was a conclusion from some
 10 of the very early work that was done, including with the
 11 Cabinet Office body that you have previously referred
 12 to.
 13 **Q.** Thank you. We see the reference there, at the end of
 14 paragraph 2, that it could be between 450 and
 15 1,000 people. So that was the size of the cohort, very
 16 early work?
 17 **A.** That was very early work. As I think the Inquiry has
 18 heard throughout its work, understanding the size of
 19 this cohort has not been straightforward and, in fact,
 20 it wasn't much longer after this particular discussion
 21 took place at the end of March, that the estimate was
 22 revised up slightly, that you have heard already.
 23 **Q.** Thank you. We may come to that. Then if we scroll down
 24 to paragraph 4 please, under the heading "Preventative
 25 efforts", this NSS paper said:

20

1 "The first challenge is to reduce the cohort of
2 those who potentially pose a risk by preventing
3 vulnerabilities emerging."
4 Yes?
5 A. Yes.
6 Q. In broad terms, without reading it all out, that looks
7 like it's sort of early preventative options. So action
8 that was involved, with both DfE and MHCLG, as we see at
9 the bottom of the page, in terms of social cohesion and
10 measures in schools and university to tackle hate and
11 educate against hate in very early stages. So
12 population-wide, early preventative measures; is that
13 the thrust of it?
14 A. That is the thrust of it and of course these
15 preventative measures would be preventative for a range
16 of vulnerabilities, but nevertheless were deemed to be
17 essential for reducing the pool of people vulnerable to
18 becoming VFIs.
19 Q. Thank you. If we go over the page, please,
20 CAB000030_0003 I think we see at point (d) that one of
21 the options of that, was:
22 "Utilising the Serious Violence Duty ..."
23 About which the Inquiry has heard:
24 "... to ensure local structures collaborate to
25 tackle the issue of VFIs ..."

21

1 Q. So, Prevention Partnerships perhaps being flagged as
2 part of the early work, but less suitable, would you
3 agree, for taking on the cases once they have reached
4 a certain level of seriousness?
5 A. Yes.
6 Q. Then moving up, I think as I have understood the paper,
7 in the levels of seriousness, the heading above
8 paragraph 6:
9 "Improving interventions for those at risk."
10 So if we can look at that, please:
11 "If vulnerabilities have not been addressed at
12 an early stage, we need a better, more effective series
13 of interventions where the state is concerned that
14 an individual is at risk of violence. One part of this
15 is ensuring that the right cases are being referred to
16 Prevent as a necessary pre-requisite for offering them
17 support, even if that comes from other services."
18 Can you help us to understand what the concern was
19 there?
20 A. Yes, so we are, as you said, moving across a spectrum of
21 individuals and a spectrum of risk. This is sort of
22 slightly further, towards the end of the spectrum of
23 people being drawn into violence. As this Inquiry has
24 heard, Prevent saw a significant spike in referrals
25 immediately after the Southport attacks, largely,

23

1 Yes?
2 A. Yes.
3 Q. Would it be right that that's a slightly different
4 aspect of early preventative, not perhaps
5 population-wide, but in the areas of high levels of
6 knife crime and high levels of violent crime, targeting
7 the roots of local problems that are assessed to be
8 contributing to that?
9 A. Yes, I think that's fair.
10 Q. Thank you. Then paragraph 5, linked issue of addressing
11 vulnerability early:
12 "... we need to better address a vulnerability once
13 it has been identified at an early stage along the
14 continuum towards violence."
15 Here we see "Prevention Partnerships" coming into
16 play again, correct?
17 A. Yes.
18 Q. I think, if we look about six lines down, one of the
19 things that was recognised early is that:
20 "While they will be unsuitable for those already
21 showing a strong propensity towards violence, they will
22 [have] a key role in helping to reduce the overall pool
23 who may be vulnerable."
24 Yes?
25 A. That is correct, yes.

22

1 I think, because of a lack of alternatives for frontline
2 service providers. So we just wanted to make sure that
3 those Prevent interventions that were offered, were
4 offered to the right people at the right time.
5 Q. Thank you. So that sense of a lack of alternatives was
6 flagged up very clearly in this same paragraph:
7 "Because of a lack of alternatives, individuals are
8 already being referred to Prevent even where there is no
9 clearly identifiable link to terrorism, so it is already
10 de facto acting as a wider front door."
11 Now, we have heard from CTPHQ, amongst others, about
12 that and that risk, but that was something being
13 recognised by Cabinet Office, again, very early in this
14 process, would you agree?
15 A. Yes.
16 Q. If we go to paragraph 7:
17 "We should avoid overwhelming the system."
18 Then the theme is returned to:
19 "But in the absence of other mechanisms, we need to
20 drive more high quality and informed referrals through
21 the swift rollout of strengthened guidance and training
22 to professionals in Prevent duty sectors, emphasising
23 Prevent's role in supporting those with a different
24 ideological threat (eg a school massacre)."
25 So just pausing there, that seems to be referring

24

1 to -- but you will correct me if I have understood this
 2 wrongly -- ensuring that frontline practitioners
 3 understand that Prevent does have a role in relation to
 4 those who are fascinated with school massacre type
 5 attacks which may not be ideologically-driven?
 6 **A.** Yes, I think that is correct. As you will have heard,
 7 Prevent does have a number of categories that are
 8 related to VFIs, but we were very clear from the outset
 9 that it was being used, by local authorities and others,
 10 to refer individuals into because those local
 11 authorities and other agencies didn't know -- or there
 12 weren't any alternatives to Prevent.
 13 So we wanted to make sure that there was -- in the
 14 pilots and the various other reforms to Prevent that
 15 were announced in December 2024, we wanted to make sure
 16 that that guidance was fully absorbed by frontline
 17 providers so that they could make those high quality
 18 referrals we refer to there.
 19 **Q.** Thank you. So that's paying attention to -- I don't
 20 mean to denigrate it or minimise it -- but tweak
 21 a nuance in the appropriate referrals to Prevent. If we
 22 go over the page CAB000030_0004, we see perhaps the
 23 underlying difficulty of the absence of alternatives is
 24 referred to.
 25 So paragraph 9:

25

1 would be provided to that prioritised cohort. I think
 2 we were still, at that stage, without a clear
 3 definition -- and we will come to this, I am sure, the
 4 importance of that definition to the ability to
 5 effectively prioritise cases and of course
 6 fundamentally, as I have said, the implications for
 7 those cases that would be effectively de-prioritised as
 8 a result but that was, and remains I think, one of the
 9 fundamental issues of how you deal with this cohort
 10 overall.
 11 **Q.** You say prioritisation of that against another cohort;
 12 what are you referring to as the other cohort? Do you
 13 mean those of lower risk in the potential VFI sphere or
 14 do you mean others with different types of needs?
 15 **A.** I mean others with different types of needs. In
 16 a finite system, finite resources, finite capacity and
 17 capability, if you prioritise one group of individuals
 18 then you are, almost by definition, de-prioritising
 19 others. So it is a complex set of trade-offs, I think,
 20 within, as I said, a finite system.
 21 **Q.** All right. So we see in 9(a) through (d) some options
 22 for delivering that sort of prioritisation. So:
 23 "Deploying Youth Offending Teams ...
 24 "Adapting the role of health services within [some]
 25 priority areas ...

27

1 "Referrals that fall short of the Channel threshold
 2 will need to receive appropriate support from other
 3 state services (social care, health, education, youth
 4 justice ...) or from law enforcement."
 5 Is that right?
 6 **A.** That is correct.
 7 **Q.** There's reference to requiring:
 8 "... clarity on referral routes and careful
 9 management of hand-offs, given current demand ... [and]
 10 while the mechanics of all of these measures require
 11 further development to ensure they are feasible, we
 12 could prioritise cases that represent a clear risk of
 13 violence to others ..."
 14 So just pausing there. Was anything ultimately done
 15 about that concept of clear prioritisation being given
 16 to higher level cases of risk, but ones that fell short
 17 of the Prevent/Channel system?
 18 **A.** Yes, and in fact this would become one of the central
 19 concerns of the early policy development. Ultimately,
 20 it became, I think, very complex. We were aware of the
 21 complexities of prioritising one cohort of individuals
 22 over another. We didn't fully understand the trade-off
 23 costs that might be associated with prioritising one
 24 cohort over another. We also -- we didn't, at that
 25 stage, have a sense of the kind of interventions that

26

1 "Utilising the evidence of which areas VFIs are
 2 concentrated in to target place-based support through
 3 additional funding ...
 4 "Continuing to invest in, and potentially expand,
 5 the Interventions Centre of Excellence to improve
 6 handling of CT casework by refining our
 7 understanding"
 8 Have any of (a) to (c) actually been done?
 9 **A.** I think that is probably slightly outside my remit. But
 10 I would say -- in terms of the specifics of those,
 11 I would, however, say that we spent quite a lot of time
 12 trying to understand, with other Government departments,
 13 with other agencies, the difficulties of prioritising
 14 VFI cases over others. Also, the difficulties of
 15 prioritising those who represent a clear risk of
 16 violence to others over those who represent a risk of
 17 violence to themselves. I think some of the feedback
 18 that we received from local authorities and other local
 19 bodies was that it is not a binary choice between those
 20 who represent a risk of violence to others and those who
 21 represent a risk of violence to themselves. Oftentimes,
 22 those are one and the same. But a lot of work was put
 23 in, in those early stages, to try and understand whether
 24 we could, in fact, prioritise VFI cases.
 25 **Q.** But in, for example -- and we will pick it up with other

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1 departments -- but to the Cabinet Office's
2 understanding, have Youth Offending Teams actually been
3 deployed to tackle specifically those at risk of
4 becoming VFIs, with an explicit remit in relation to
5 them?

6 **A.** I'm not able to answer that question. We can come back
7 to you on that, if that would be helpful.

8 **Q.** The local or national level assurance is then flagged as
9 a concern:

10 "In comparison to the CT system ..."

11 Then it is in bold:

12 "... we have very limited national assurance for
13 vulnerable individuals with no individual agency
14 responsible."

15 From the context of that, what might be inferred is
16 that the concern is, well -- my words -- with Prevent
17 there is an oversight over its assurance, with
18 a recognised system. For those falling short of Prevent
19 and Channel, we have a problem because there's no
20 recognised pathway, no consistent individual agency
21 responsible and, therefore, no system of national
22 assurance for tracking what happens to that cohort or
23 tracking the quality of interventions. Now, that's my
24 inference of what was being addressed here but is that
25 a fair summary of the concern?

29

1 As with some recommendations from the National Security
2 Council and others, they will be subject to further work
3 by the lead Government department to assess the
4 viability of the particular proposal. My understanding
5 is that the Home Office has done work to look at this
6 proposal. As you say, it has not been specifically
7 cost -- costings have not been specifically estimated
8 yet for it, although I understand some early Home Office
9 work suggested it would be in the hundreds of millions
10 of pounds and would be, most likely, a multi-year
11 effort. I think that is probably fair. But as you say,
12 it has not been developed yet.

13 **Q.** We will come back to that. Then if we go over the page
14 CAB000030_0005, please, and scroll down a little bit, we
15 have "Online environment". So:

16 "The widespread availability and algorithmic
17 promotion of violent and extremist content online
18 provides a gateway to a process of radicalisation."

19 So, again, two points to arise from that. First of
20 all, that's recognised at a very senior level, very
21 early on?

22 **A.** Correct.

23 **Q.** And there doesn't seem to be any caveats drawn into
24 this, in terms of saying: we are not yet sure on its
25 causative effect, we haven't seen the scientific

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1 **A.** I think it is, yes.

2 **Q.** Thank you, and in, by now familiar, terms the paper was
3 flagging overtly, line 2:

4 "Instead, there exists a patchwork of local
5 provision, largely dependent on local prioritisation and
6 resourcing, with no single case management system to
7 manage and track hand-offs and delivery of interventions
8 across the country."

9 And that reflects, doesn't it, the point that we
10 have just been talking about?

11 **A.** Indeed.

12 **Q.** Then, still very early on:

13 "Given this, we should develop a national prevention
14 gateway to serve as a single point of referral for all
15 cases where there is a risk of violence to others,
16 underpinned by a single case management system to track
17 individuals nationally."

18 Now, this is a high-level paper from a senior body
19 and it doesn't seem to be demurring there very much
20 about that intent. "We should develop a national
21 prevention gateway" is pretty directive. We know that
22 that (a) hasn't happened, and (b) has not yet been fully
23 costed. Can you help with, first of all, the sense in
24 which this was a determined ambition early on?

25 **A.** So as the paper sets out, it was a determined ambition.

30

1 research to show causative effect. It is pretty punchy:

2 "The widespread availability and algorithmic
3 promotion of violent and extremist content online
4 provides a gateway to a process of radicalisation."

5 **A.** That was our view at the time from the information
6 available to us. As you say, the evidence is still
7 being pulled together but I think there is emerging
8 evidence to suggest a link between exposure to violent
9 content and violent acts in the real world.

10 **Q.** I mean, at this stage, certainly from this paper, the
11 sense that one gets is that the National Security
12 Secretariat was perfectly happy to identify this as
13 a priority without further research, perhaps taking the
14 view -- you will tell me if you disagree -- that it is
15 obvious or at least the precautionary approach would
16 commend treating it as obvious?

17 **A.** I think it is the precautionary approach that we would
18 be taking, wanting to be bold as possible with ministers
19 and departments, to encourage steps to be taken to
20 assess that further.

21 **Q.** Thank you. Then if we can go on to paragraph 19, please
22 CAB000030_0006 again, taking it from the helpful
23 emboldening in the original paper:

24 "Our starting objective must be to reduce the
25 exposure of vulnerable individuals, especially children,

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1 to both online content and online communities which can
 2 motivate them to violence, terrorist or otherwise."
 3 Yes?
 4 A. Yes.
 5 Q. Then paragraph 21, I think over the page, please,
 6 CAB000030_0007 in terms of how that was to be done:
 7 "Does the [relevant body] agree to ...
 8 "Encourage Ofcom to go hard on enforcement of the
 9 OSA ..."
 10 Yes?
 11 A. Yes.
 12 Q. I don't want to take it out of context, but that sense
 13 of there being a need to encourage Ofcom to go hard on
 14 the enforcement of the OSA, to the outside observer
 15 would reflect a concern that, up until that stage, Ofcom
 16 had not gone hard on enforcement?
 17 A. So I think the Online Safety Act, when it was drafted
 18 I think in 2022/2023, was quite ahead of its time.
 19 I think in the years -- brief years since then, we have
 20 seen that the Online Safety Act still needs to go
 21 further and I think that is the settled position of
 22 Government, that there needs to be further development
 23 to the Online Safety Act, and, indeed, on enforcement of
 24 the Online Safety Act.
 25 Several elements of the Online Safety Act only came

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1 executives whose services fail to identify and remove
 2 illegal content ..."
 3 Other than the provisions in the OSA over the duty
 4 to have a system in place and enforcement, there hasn't,
 5 as we understand it, been an extension of civil or
 6 criminal liability beyond that?
 7 A. I believe that is true.
 8 Q. And:
 9 "Determine feasibility and desirability of
 10 device-level interventions for terrorism or extreme
 11 violence-related material, building on industry-led
 12 innovation in other areas."
 13 Now, we know that -- with the work of the Rt Hon
 14 Angela Rayner and others -- that the device-level
 15 protections for nudity is something that is being taken
 16 forward and I don't wish to suggest that that's
 17 irrelevant because in relation to Com networks that may
 18 play a mitigating risk.
 19 But this area of action, for which the NSS was in
 20 favour of acting now, seems to be directed device-level
 21 interventions for extreme violence-related material and
 22 again, as the Inquiry understand it, that's not yet been
 23 actioned?
 24 A. That has not yet been actioned, no.
 25 Q. Thank you. That then led, I think, to the National

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1 online over the course of years since the Act was made
 2 law, but I think that is the settled view of Government,
 3 that more needed to be done to enforce it.
 4 Q. Thank you. Then:
 5 "Develop legislative proposals on specific issues
 6 where the balance is in favour of acting [original
 7 words] now to reduce risk to public safety and national
 8 security."
 9 As well as updating legislation, the 2006 Terrorism
 10 Act, they included:
 11 "Strengthen[ing] the reporting requirements around
 12 illegal content to require companies to take reasonable
 13 steps to identify users who upload or interact with
 14 illegal material on their services.
 15 "Building on the provisions in the OSA, develop
 16 a faster takedown regime for disputed content, whereby
 17 government or law enforcement could directly issue and
 18 enforce notices requiring specific content to be
 19 removed ..."
 20 Just pausing on that. The "acting now to reduce the
 21 risk" by doing that, that has not yet been achieved, has
 22 it?
 23 A. It has not, but it is in train.
 24 Q. Fourthly:
 25 "Extend civil or criminal liability for tech

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1 Security Council meeting itself. So, if we could look
 2 at page 17 of your statement, paragraph 61
 3 CAB000003_0017. You will forgive me, Dr Abbott, for
 4 jumping around, but we will introduce things by your
 5 statement and then go to the minutes. So page 17, of
 6 the statement, paragraph 61.
 7 So you explain there that:
 8 "Following the NSC, detailed actions were recorded
 9 for departments and agencies to complete, most of which
 10 required cross-departmental working ..."
 11 So sir, you have that in Dr Abbott's statement but
 12 if we can take it from the original document, please.
 13 So that's CAB000053. So, again, just to make sure we
 14 have got the context. February meeting, didn't consider
 15 VFIs, we are now in the 25 March meeting. The first two
 16 actions, sir, are available to you but have a type 2
 17 redaction and needn't concern our evidence today.
 18 But if we can pick it up at 3, the actions for DfE,
 19 Home Office, Ministry of Housing, Community and Local
 20 Government and Ministry of Justice, with a deadline of
 21 1 May:
 22 "Confirm to [the National Security Secretariat] that
 23 the following measures ... have been, or are being,
 24 implemented in order to reduce the number of individuals
 25 susceptible to radicalisation and/or extreme violence."

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1 Now I'm not going to go through those, but if you
2 just scan your eyes, Dr Abbott, if you would over (a)
3 and (b) and then we will go over the page, please
4 CAB000053_0002, we see that follows those aspects of
5 early preventative action that we saw in the earlier
6 paper; is that fair?

7 **A.** That's fair, yes.

8 **Q.** Thank you. If we scroll down a little bit, please. So
9 action 4 was then:

10 "Accelerate a national roll-out plan for Prevention
11 Partnerships and wider complementary work to identify
12 and support minors showing signs of vulnerability
13 towards extreme violence.

14 Home Office working with other departments, 1 July.
15 So that it is not suggested later on that I'm
16 cherry-picking particular points, the reason why I'm
17 going to deal with that at length with you is that
18 Mr Emmett dealt with that in evidence and we looked at
19 the proportion of the country that's covered by the
20 pilot. So it is fair to recognise that that was an area
21 where there was concrete action and we have the
22 up-to-date position. So I'm not overlooking that.

23 Then item 5:

24 "Update guidance to expand Channel thresholds, with
25 a particular focus on capturing borderline cases and

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1 invest?

2 **A.** So this would have been a responsibility for those
3 departments to negotiate directly with the Treasury. So
4 I wouldn't necessarily have seen the precise details of
5 those negotiations. Usually what happens is the
6 Treasury will set a departmental allocation for
7 a particular Government department and then it is the
8 responsibility of that department to decide, within that
9 overall allocation, how they divide that up according to
10 their respective priorities.

11 **Q.** But -- I don't raise this critically of you, because we
12 need to know what we pick up with other departments --
13 but is the short answer, I hope without discourtesy,
14 that you don't actually know?

15 **A.** That is correct.

16 **Q.** Thank you. Then we see CAB000053_0003:

17 "This should include:

18 "Prioritising local authorities with a high
19 concentration of VFIs ...

20 "Youth Offending Teams ...

21 " ... adapting health services ...

22 "Continuing to invest in, and potentially expand,
23 the Interventions Centre of Excellence ..."

24 So, again, mirroring the NSS paper that we looked at
25 a moment ago?

39

1 repeat referrals."

2 2 June for the Home Office. Now, that does seem to
3 refer to work, not just on pilots and looking at
4 thresholds and the below thresholds, but to certain
5 aspects of the Prevent system and borderline cases and
6 repeat referrals, yes?

7 **A.** Yes.

8 **Q.** Sir, you will recall, we have had evidence about the
9 repeat referrals policy and again, so as to avoid
10 unfairness in relation to that, we have heard from CTPHQ
11 about the updated position on repeat referrals. So,
12 again, we know that there was action there.

13 But on point 6:

14 "Local services should prioritise the VFI cohort
15 (individuals who do not meet Channel thresholds, but do
16 represent a clear risk of violence to others) across the
17 national security, social care, health, education, youth
18 justice and law enforcement systems. Any resourcing and
19 financial implication of delivering this should be
20 considered at the Spending Review."

21 Just pausing there. Did the spending review, to
22 your knowledge, include any of the relevant departments
23 saying: we are going to need more funding, or: we are
24 going to need to be permitted to move more funding into
25 this area because of the VFI risk and the need to

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1 **A.** Yes, that's correct, and as we discussed a few minutes
2 ago, our focus on prioritising those at becoming VFIs or
3 those at risk of harm to others over harm to themselves,
4 that was a focus of our work in early 2025.

5 **Q.** Thank you, and if we can scroll down a little bit, just
6 to take that to the end of that. So Dr Abbott, as you,
7 I think will be familiar with from watching other
8 evidence, in places I will overtly draw in questions
9 that have come from Core Participants and the three
10 victims teams in relation to this action 6 have asked,
11 noting that action 6 required local services to
12 prioritise the sub-Channel cohort and that plans were
13 due by 1 July, was that actually delivered by that date?
14 What actions of prioritisation actually happened, for
15 example, with MASH, CAMHS, and so on?

16 **A.** That is still a work in train, as I think one of my
17 other exhibits sets out. Local authorities, I think,
18 you know, they will have to take the individual
19 vulnerabilities of a particular case into account and we
20 know that there is some excellent work going on at local
21 level to try and prioritise these particular individuals
22 but I think -- and we will come again to this question
23 of definition -- I think they have struggled, without
24 a clear national definition of VFIs, to effectively
25 prioritise at local level.

40

1 Q. If we just go back up, to see the date for action 6 and
2 the top of it again, please. So just on the previous
3 page CAB000053_0002. The date for the delivery of that
4 was 1 July. Do you feel that you got, within the
5 Cabinet Office, clear, targeted, specific plans for how
6 that was going to be achieved, the attainment of that by
7 local services, whether Health, Ministry of Justice?

8 A. No, we did not by that date.

9 Q. Why not?

10 A. Because of some of the complexities that I have referred
11 to. So we had a series of quite in-depth conversations
12 with those departments ahead of that date about the
13 difficulties of prioritising the VFI cohort at local
14 level and as a result, we did not get the detailed plans
15 that you have referred to it.

16 Q. Isn't there a fundamental problem here, that, in
17 a sense, that is a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy?
18 The paper has flagged up -- my paraphrase, you will
19 forgive me -- this is a very difficult area, there isn't
20 a single pathway, there is a patchwork of local
21 measures, it is very complicated. If the action, in
22 relation to that, is to have targeted plans delivered by
23 1 July, the response: well, it wasn't done because it is
24 very complicated, doesn't seem, on the face of it,
25 a very good one?

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1 Does the same apply in relation to that?

2 A. Yes, we wanted this to be a floor not a ceiling, as it
3 were, and to encourage departments and local authorities
4 who work for those departments to be as ambitious as
5 possible and as creative as possible in the solutions
6 that they brought to this problem. So that action
7 I think was an idea -- had the idea to try and push
8 departments as far as possible. As we have already
9 discussed, the initial action wasn't -- it wasn't
10 possible to complete the initial action, so this did not
11 happen either.

12 Q. Thank you. Then, action 8:

13 "Scope a national prevention gateway and case
14 management service for the management of VFIs and
15 vulnerable individuals more broadly."

16 In a general sense, what the Inquiry has heard about
17 that from Mr Emmett -- I hope I don't summarise it
18 unfairly -- is that there hasn't been detailed scoping
19 and costings with precise different options and precise
20 time lines, but there has been a broader scoping
21 exercise, the one you referred to, the costing in the
22 low hundred millions and a multi-year period to
23 introduce it?

24 A. That is correct.

25 Q. Then over the page, CAB000053_0004, 9:

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1 A. No, I agree with you and I think there may be an issue
2 here with the deadlines that we were imposing, that they
3 were potentially unrealistic. You know, it is, I think,
4 important to understand the Cabinet Office's role in
5 this is to try and drive progress as fast as we possibly
6 can and that will sometimes feel uncomfortable for
7 departments and there will sometimes need to be
8 a revision to those deadlines.

9 I think it is also, I think, important to reflect on
10 how long it can take to get system reforms like this
11 underway. If you look, for example, at Prevent.
12 Prevent was established in 2003. Channel was piloted
13 from 2007 and not rolled out nationally until 2012. So
14 some similar programmes that the Government has led on
15 have taken several years to bring into practice.

16 So I think, like I said at the start, this deadline
17 was perhaps unrealistic and, as we know, we are still in
18 the middle of trying to understand this very complicated
19 system.

20 Q. Thank you. Can we scroll down, please, to action
21 area 7. Then beyond those local service
22 prioritisations:

23 "Scope further, more ambitious options which go
24 beyond those in Action 6 for how social services can
25 prioritise and support VFIs."

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1 "DSIT [as was, Secretary of State] to update [the]
2 NSC with a package of measures."

3 Again, I'm not going to read them all out because
4 I think you will agree that they reflected the NSS
5 paper, yes?

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. We will come on, perhaps, to that by reference to our
8 next document. But then if we see action area 10
9 CAB000053_0005:

10 "Develop the following legislative proposals" for
11 the Home Office. Because those are Home Office
12 specific, we dealt with that to a large extent with
13 Mr Emmett, so I'm not going to go through them again.
14 But those are some of the areas which I think you agree
15 that some of those have simply not yet been taken
16 forward, at least in concrete terms?

17 A. Correct.

18 Q. Then 11:

19 "Reflect in departmental [Spending Review] returns
20 the need to invest significantly in national capability
21 to detect, identify, and disrupt online criminality,
22 aiming to partner with tech companies where possible,
23 but including the capacity to do so on a sovereign basis
24 where companies cannot or will not act."

25 So that seems to envisage encouragement and

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1 partnership with the big tech companies where possible,
2 but His Majesty's Government might need to act on a more
3 unilateral basis, if they won't act; do you agree?

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. Thank you. Did that include in the VFI sphere, do you
6 know, that action?

7 A. So this was largely to do, I think, with terrorist
8 content and illegal content online.

9 Q. Thank you. If we go back then, Dr Abbott, to your
10 statement. It is page 18 CAB000003_0018 and
11 paragraph 62. You say, as we have been exploring:

12 "Overall, progress against the actions has been
13 mixed ..."

14 Yes?

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. What do you mean by that, looking at it in more detail?
17 That can cover a range.

18 A. So I think what this was trying to assess is the balance
19 between what we did achieve, and this is not just in the
20 NSC meeting that we have been discussing, but in the
21 period since then, where I think we have a much better
22 understanding of the cohort, including the size and
23 trajectory. That is still not complete but I think we
24 are better now than where we were. I think the Home
25 Office has introduced a number of reforms to Prevent and

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1 as I said, the Home Office have done some scoping work
2 and have done some initial thinking. I think as
3 Mr Emmett set out, they do not want to prejudice the
4 outcome of this Inquiry. If I was pressed on that,
5 I think I would say we want more options developed
6 potentially at risk so that we can shorten the time
7 frame between the end of this Inquiry reporting and
8 getting some of those options ready to go.

9 Q. But there's a range of areas that were identified at
10 this very early stage where, in concrete terms, nothing
11 yet has eventuated. So for example, device-level
12 controls on violent content?

13 A. But we do have, now, device-level controls on nudity.
14 Or at least that is going to be legislated.

15 Q. Forgive me, Dr Abbott, but as we have seen in the paper,
16 the paper was identifying the point that I put to you?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. And specific take-down powers, while action, you say, is
19 in train in relation to that, it remains the case that,
20 even for terrorist material, there's no current ability
21 for His Majesty's Government to require particular
22 material to be taken down. There is a process
23 requirement and there may be financial penalties for
24 those companies who don't comply with the process duty.
25 But a specific take-down power doesn't exist for

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1 taken on additional work on Prevent, for example, around
2 neurodivergence and mental health. I think some of
3 those Prevent pilots that we have referred to have been
4 I think very helpful. Partners have developed quite
5 a lot of their own understanding of this area, including
6 their own guidance and definitions. I think you have
7 heard that from Counter Terrorism Policing.

8 We have done a lot of engagement with local
9 authorities, including through the workshops that NSS
10 ran in Manchester and in Birmingham, the interim
11 guidance that we will come to, I am sure, that the Home
12 Office has issued and some of the online measures,
13 including the under-16 ban on social media, the
14 device-level interventions and some of Jonathan Hall's
15 recommendations, for example, on acts preparatory to
16 mass casualty violence that is not on the statute books
17 yet but it is in train.

18 I think this Inquiry as well has served to move us
19 on quite significantly forward. That is on the sort of
20 plus side of the ledger. We have clearly covered some
21 of the things, a few minutes ago, that were not done.

22 Q. Yes, and on the other side of the ledger there are areas
23 where no action has yet been taken at all?

24 A. I don't think I would characterise it in that way. If
25 you take the national prevention gateway, for example,

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1 terrorist material, let alone for extreme gore or
2 violent material?

3 A. There is, no doubt, more work to be done. I agree.

4 Q. Thank you. In relation to that, if we look, please, at
5 a document that you refer to in your statement, which is
6 the action tracker for this. If we look at CAB000027.
7 The format, I think, for this is a familiar RAG rating,
8 of green, amber and red; is that right?

9 A. That is correct.

10 Q. I wonder if we could flip over onto action area 7.
11 Forgive me, action area 9 CAB000027_0004, because,
12 without going through the totality of this, if one just
13 reminds oneself of the actions that were set, so:

14 "DSIT [Secretary of State] to update ... with
15 a package ...

16 "How to reform [the Government's] approach to tech
17 companies;

18 "A review of Ofcom's structure, operations and how
19 [the Government] interacts with it;

20 "How to support Ofcom to go hard on enforcement ...

21 "Scoping the feasibility and desirability for
22 device-level interventions for terrorism or extreme
23 violence-related material ..."

24 So if one remembers what the emphasis was:

25 "Options to extend civil or criminal liability for

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1 tech executives whose services fail to ..."
 2 Just over the page CAB000027_0005:
 3 "... identify and remove illegal content and how
 4 this approach would compare internationally; and ...
 5 "Options to go further, eg on restricting social
 6 media access for children drawn from consideration of
 7 international models such as the Australian approach."
 8 If we can go back to the previous page
 9 CAB000027_0004, what's written is "complete". Is it
 10 complete?
 11 **A.** No, it is not.
 12 **Q.** Why does the tracker say so?
 13 **A.** I think the tracker was trying to get at the intent of
 14 the action, which was to take further steps with regards
 15 to the online space. But clearly, if you look at the
 16 specifics under action 9, there is more work still to be
 17 done.
 18 **Q.** Yes. So it says, after "complete":
 19 "DSIT (as it then was) ..."
 20 So we know this is a recent version of action
 21 tracker because it is looking at the machinery of
 22 Government changes, so:
 23 "... provided an update to the NSC in [the] summer
 24 [of] 2025.
 25 "More pertinently, the intent of the action was for
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1 RAG rating. That can't be right, is it?
 2 **A.** It is not right and I think it would not be fair to
 3 characterise the ambition as being watered down,
 4 certainly with respect to NSS. We have taken this
 5 exceptionally seriously from the start and continue to
 6 do so. As that action does set out, there is further
 7 work to be done and we continue to work with DCMS, as
 8 they are now, on that. Making changes on the online
 9 space is exceptionally complex and difficult. We
 10 recognise the difficulty and have not given up and
 11 trying to bring in further measures that will tackle
 12 some of the issues listed here in number 9.
 13 **Q.** I follow, but you agreed with me, Dr Abbott, in terms of
 14 the seriousness with which NSC actions should be
 15 taken --
 16 **A.** Yes.
 17 **Q.** -- and if it doesn't represent a watering down of
 18 ambition, what's the explanation for the language of
 19 "complete" and a green RAG rating, when you have
 20 accepted that it is not appropriate?
 21 **A.** So, as I said, we were trying to get at the intent of
 22 this action. Where we think actions have been taken,
 23 concrete actions have been taken, that will make the
 24 online space safer for young people and that was the
 25 overall intent that we were trying to capture. But
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1 HMG to consider which of these measures could support
 2 a greater push on online safety, including with regard
 3 to CT/VFI content online. [The Government] has now
 4 indicated it will push forward with (i) device-level
 5 interventions; and (ii) a social media ban for
 6 under 16s."
 7 Now, the device-level interventions, as we've
 8 touched upon, are in nudity, and I hope I've fairly
 9 indicated, that's not irrelevant because of Com network
 10 risks --
 11 **A.** Yes.
 12 **Q.** -- but it is not actually addressing what was in the
 13 left-hand column and a social media ban. It does say:
 14 "NSS continues to work with DSIT on further measures
 15 in this space."
 16 But the assessment of that as being green, might be
 17 thought to be surprising and overly optimistic, would
 18 you agree?
 19 **A.** I would agree.
 20 **Q.** Does that -- I'm not going to go through others, where
 21 perhaps similar points might be advanced -- but does
 22 this not tend to show the risk, in the civil service
 23 approach to these things, whereby the initial ambition
 24 gets watered down and you end up saying: well, six
 25 items, the intent has been done by two, is green on your
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1 I recognise that this should have been more accurately
 2 categorised in orange.
 3 **Q.** Has it been corrected since?
 4 **A.** We will correct it.
 5 **Q.** Thank you. If we can go back to your statement, please,
 6 and look at page 19 CAB000003_0019, paragraph 66. We
 7 pick it up on 9 June. So you see that:
 8 "... the Cabinet Secretary re-convened Permanent
 9 Secretaries and other senior officials to test progress
 10 since [the] first meeting on 29 January 2025 ..."
 11 Is that right?
 12 **A.** Correct.
 13 **Q.** Thank you. If we can go to that please, it is
 14 CAB000006. So just sticking with the header page for
 15 the moment. Again, similar to the meeting in January.
 16 Now the 9 June, again, not exactly the same attendees,
 17 but the seniority of those attending, fairly obvious?
 18 **A.** Agreed.
 19 **Q.** If one just looks -- obviously he had a change of roles
 20 subsequently, but one just notes that at this stage,
 21 Dame Antonia Romeo was attending in the role of
 22 Permanent Secretary of the Home Office?
 23 **A.** Correct.
 24 **Q.** Thank you, and then we see your name as part of the
 25 Secretariat. Then if we can go over, please, to page 2
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1 CAB000006_0002. So this is the Chair's meeting brief:
 2 "This is your second meeting on VFIs."
 3 So this is a briefing to the Cabinet Secretary:
 4 "Since your first discussion on 29th January, there
 5 has been some progress, including on assessment work and
 6 strengthening Prevent."
 7 Then these words:
 8 "But the closing stages of [Spending Review]
 9 negotiations, as well as a continued surge of referrals
 10 into Prevent, have given departments cover to slow the
 11 pace."
 12 What do you make of that?
 13 A. Well, that was our assessment at the time. Yes, our
 14 negotiations were ongoing at that point and departments
 15 were, I think, understandably very, very focused on
 16 those and that made it hard, I think, for them to
 17 prioritise the work in this area. That was our
 18 assessment at that time.
 19 Q. Thank you. If we look at the "Running order" section,
 20 and item one, so if we scroll down a little bit:
 21 "The objective of the meeting ..."
 22 First bullet point:
 23 "... is to surface any substantial blockers to
 24 delivering what was agreed ..."
 25 So to identify what is preventing quicker action, in

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1 Q. Thank you, and lower down the page, please:
 2 "Depending on the discussion, you could conclude by
 3 saying that ..."
 4 Then the final bullet point:
 5 "... this work may require refinement based on the
 6 latest evidence, including from international
 7 comparators, but this must not be a barrier [for] us
 8 taking action."
 9 I mean, was there, amongst the Secretariat, which
 10 included of course you, doctor, was there a level of
 11 frustration at the speed of action?
 12 A. I think, as I set out before, the Cabinet Office always
 13 wants to see policy developed at pace, creatively and
 14 innovatively; that is one of the stated roles of the
 15 Cabinet Office. I think there was some frustration that
 16 we weren't moving faster by this stage. But, also,
 17 what's important to remember is that we are not the
 18 experts in these particular areas and so departments and
 19 agencies will have, in many cases, legitimate reasons
 20 for not being able to move at quite the pace that the
 21 Cabinet Office would like.
 22 Q. Thank you. If we go over the page CAB000006_0004:
 23 "Progress on updating the threat from VFIs."
 24 First bullet point there:
 25 "Underscore that the discussion should focus on

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1 plainer English?
 2 A. Correct.
 3 Q. Thank you. Then page 3 CAB000006_0003, please. Under
 4 item two, the second bullet point, you mentioned this
 5 earlier on that the size of the cohort work developed.
 6 So we see that, don't we:
 7 "On the size and trajectory of the cohort, seek
 8 agreement from the group that the 1,500 number cited is
 9 accurate and makes use of a sufficient range of data
 10 source assist to be robust."
 11 So that is the sort of upward development of the
 12 assessment of the number, I think, that you referred to
 13 earlier?
 14 A. Correct.
 15 Q. But so far as the brief to the Cabinet Secretary was
 16 concerned, the point of emphasis, we see at the end of
 17 that paragraph:
 18 "... emphasise to the group that this is a small,
 19 manageable cohort to begin prioritising for services."
 20 Again, the inference one might take from that is, in
 21 terms of that action around different Government
 22 departments ensuring that the patchwork of services
 23 gives priority to VFIs, it should be a manageable group
 24 to do that?
 25 A. That was our view, yes.

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1 solutions to the problems, and while there has been
 2 positive progress, the [Prime Minister] will expect us
 3 to go significantly further -- particularly in terms of
 4 moving beyond Reviews and Inquiries and delivering
 5 change which has a real-world impact."
 6 I mean, to some extent, that speaks for itself, but
 7 it is flagging a concern that slightly: we have got
 8 reviews and inquiries going on, we need to have positive
 9 actual change at ground level?
 10 A. Agreed, and that was a common position for the Cabinet
 11 Office throughout this period.
 12 Q. Thank you. If we can look at the middle of the page,
 13 please, where it says:
 14 "Turn to Antonia Romeo" and that is why I flagged up
 15 what her role was at that stage, as Permanent Secretary
 16 of the Home Office. There is reference there to the
 17 introduction of the Home Office paper that Dame Antonia
 18 and Chloe Squires were going -- I think in the meeting,
 19 going to be asked to speak to; is that right?
 20 A. Correct.
 21 Q. Thank you, and then the first sub-bullet:
 22 "On prioritising the cohort, you should emphasise
 23 that this is a small (if growing) number: we must make
 24 urgent progress on prioritising the cohort ..."
 25 So again, further emphasis to that:

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1 "Endorse the suggestion in the paper that the Home
2 Office and social policy departments should communicate
3 the NSC commitment to prioritising the cohort to Local
4 Authorities and others ..."

5 So that seems to be agreeing with the Home Office
6 putting pressure on social policy departments to get
7 action at local authority level?

8 A. Yes, that is correct. I mean, I wouldn't necessarily
9 categorise it as putting pressure on. The Home Office
10 worked with social policy departments, indeed they were
11 represented in this very meeting, to make sure that the
12 channels of communication with the local level were
13 working effectively.

14 Q. Thank you. We see the national prevention gateway
15 mentioned and seeking views on feasibility of the
16 paper's recommendation. If we just scroll down to the
17 bottom of the page:

18 "Noting ... the Prevent Commissioner, Lord Anderson,
19 is likely to recommend substantive [change] to the
20 system ... Depending on the discussion, you could
21 action the Home Office to ensure thinking on the
22 creation of new gateway ... is much more developed and
23 nuanced so it is a feasible option for announcement in
24 July."

25 Now, if one just pauses there. The concept, in this

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1 might have hoped it would have been.

2 Q. Thank you. Then if we go over the page CAB000006_0005
3 just to the bottom, remembering that this is a briefing
4 note. So the Cabinet Secretary, briefing:

5 "Emphasise to the group the importance of exploring
6 the art of the possible in problem-solving.

7 "We are all operating in the context of reduced
8 resources. But the threat isn't going away. We have to
9 be pragmatic and determined."

10 Yes?

11 A. Yes, and that was our view the whole way through this
12 process.

13 Q. Then, just perhaps before we have our mid-morning break,
14 could we just pick up on the various other papers
15 because this I think was the briefing to the Cabinet
16 Secretary. The papers concerned, can you just help us
17 confirm them, CAB000024. So just, again, being careful
18 with the label, but this is the Cabinet Office body
19 paper and if we look at page 2 CAB000024_0002, this is
20 the "Executive Summary". If we could have the top of
21 the page expanded, which we picked up with DAC Evans.
22 So this is work on definitions and the size of the
23 cohort, yes, from that Cabinet Office body?

24 A. Correct.

25 Q. Then CAB000007. So this, I think you can confirm, is

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1 June meeting, that there might be an announcement of
2 a national prevention gateway as early as July 2025,
3 that seems quite striking, doesn't it?

4 A. Yes. I mean, as I have said before, the Cabinet
5 Office's view is often to try and push departments to do
6 things as quickly as they possibly can. I think, with
7 hindsight, clearly that would not be -- that was not
8 going to be ready or was not ready for announcement in
9 July, added to which, this Inquiry I think had started
10 by that point and there was some resistance, I think,
11 from the Home Office to announcing things whilst the
12 Inquiry was ongoing.

13 Q. Reflecting on matters now, does it reflect that, at the
14 centre, the Cabinet Office and the National Security
15 Secretariat had perhaps underestimated the complexity
16 and potentially the cost of that option?

17 A. I don't know if we had underestimated it. I think, as
18 I said, it would always be our starting position to push
19 departments to move as quickly as possible. We were
20 starting to, at that stage, get much more I think
21 granular detail on the difficulties around the cohort,
22 around the interventions and, as I have said before,
23 around prioritisation. So I think it is not
24 unreasonable, with hindsight, that this was not ready
25 perhaps for announcement in July in the way that we

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1 the Home Office paper?

2 A. That is correct.

3 Q. We see paragraph 2:

4 "The operational context is very difficult.

5 A sustained and significant surge in Prevent referrals
6 risks overwhelming the counter terrorism-terrorism
7 system and is accruing risk."

8 There is a reference to the number of referrals,
9 which we have heard about. Then paragraph 3:

10 "Resources are not going to increase. The [Spending
11 Review] endgame points to a ..."

12 Then underlined in the original:

13 "... very constrained fiscal environment which will
14 constrain our ability to act now and places most options
15 for risk mitigation beyond reach."

16 That's a fairly stark and bleak message?

17 A. It is.

18 Q. Paragraph 4, as a result:

19 "Taken together, these factors mean that it is
20 likely we will need to recalibrate our future
21 expectations to focus on protecting our capacity to
22 maintain existing systems at a level which is
23 sustainable and make only incremental and cost-neutral
24 changes in the future."

25 Again, cutting through that, that seems to be

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1 saying: expectation management time, we are not going to
 2 be able to afford these bigger ambition items. Our
 3 focus is going to have to be on keeping the current
 4 system going in a way that is sustainable, and
 5 elsewhere, the sort of improvements and changes will
 6 need to be incremental and cost neutral?
 7 **A.** That is what that says, yes, I agree.
 8 **Q.** Thank you. Then page 3 CAB000007_0003, thank you, if we
 9 can have paragraphs 6 to 9:
 10 "The Prime Minister, Home Secretary and Security
 11 Minister have made significant public commitments which
 12 have largely been, or will shortly be, delivered. Many
 13 relate to inquiries, reviews and oversight. These are
 14 of course crucial but are likely to feel less tangible
 15 as part of a public narrative.
 16 "We are assuming that we will not be in a position
 17 to announce any significant shift in the overall system
 18 approach to managing VFI related risk given fiscal
 19 constraints ...
 20 "Any [Government] narrative which goes beyond
 21 inquiries, reviews and oversight (all of which are
 22 crucial components of the early commitment to
 23 transparency) is therefore likely to need to focus on:
 24 "(Re)emphasising our commitment to transparency,
 25 citing the progress on inquiries, reviews and oversight;

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1 More detail is in the document itself. Then
 2 paragraph 21:
 3 "Given the very challenging fiscal context it is
 4 highly likely that we will need to fundamentally reset
 5 expectations for this objective."
 6 So Dr Abbott, it must be right that there had been
 7 a significant shift since the NSC meeting and resource
 8 considerations, at least as the Home Office were
 9 explaining things, that previously considered
 10 recommendations simply couldn't be progressed?
 11 **A.** Certainly not at that time, that is correct.
 12 **MR MOSS:** Thank you. Sir, would be that a convenient moment
 13 to take a 15-minute break?
 14 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** It certainly would. We will sit again
 15 at quarter to. Thank you very much.
 16 **(11.30 am)**
 17 **(A short break)**
 18 **(11.45 am)**
 19 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Yes, Mr Moss.
 20 **MR MOSS:** Thank you, sir. Dr Abbott, before the short break
 21 you will remember we were looking at the 9 June 2025
 22 meeting convened by the Cabinet Secretary, and in
 23 paragraphs 67 to 69 of your statement, you deal with
 24 some subsequent subordinate meetings. I don't overlook
 25 them but the detail is in your statement.

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1 "Communicating our understanding of the VFI risk,
 2 [and] how it manifests and how we are responding to it;
 3 "Communicating and contextualising significant
 4 improvements to Prevent ..."
 5 And:
 6 "Setting out a (limited) legislative package to
 7 address VFI risk ..."
 8 Then if we go to page 6 CAB000007_0006, objective 3.
 9 Paragraph 19 to 21:
 10 "The March NSC asked the Home Office to scope out
 11 the potential for a broader multi-agency system for
 12 violence prevention ..."
 13 Then it is quoted. Then paragraph 20:
 14 "Consideration to date has identified four broad
 15 options ..."
 16 If we could just scroll down so all four are on
 17 screen. I'm not going to run through the detail. But
 18 option 1 was:
 19 "Conclude current VFI-related Prevent surge ...
 20 "Option 2 -- Maintain current VFI-related Prevent
 21 surge ..."
 22 Option 3 -- Maintain current VFI-related Prevent
 23 surge ... and expand existing systems ..."
 24 Option 4 -- Establish a new National Violence
 25 Prevention Gateway ..."

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1 I wonder if we could pick up, please, at the stage
 2 of the publication of Lord Anderson's report, so for
 3 that purpose, could we have your statement, page 20
 4 CAB000003_0020, paragraph 70 please.
 5 I think it is the bottom of the page. So you
 6 reference there the twin subjects of Lord Anderson's
 7 report and you say that it was published on 16 July and
 8 you helpfully draw attention to two of his
 9 recommendations. Firstly, that:
 10 "Prevent should be further strengthened, remaining
 11 'open to individuals falling within the existing
 12 category of fascination with extreme violence or mass
 13 casualty attacks'. He recommended that consistent
 14 efforts should be made to improve the quality of
 15 referrals."
 16 Then (b) CAB000003_0021:
 17 "An 'ambitious' proposal to '[take] Prevent within
 18 a comprehensive safeguarding and violence prevention
 19 strategy', referred to as a 'big ... front door'.
 20 And his recommendation in relation to that:
 21 "... that '[a] Cabinet Office taskforce should be
 22 established to lead exploratory work into the
 23 possibility of formally connecting Prevent to a broader
 24 safeguarding and violence prevention system."
 25 Then we see, in paragraph 71, Dr Abbott, that you

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1 helpfully summarised the fact that, on 15 August --
 2 please don't use the name, but the:
 3 "... Director [of] Intelligence and Security in
 4 [the] NSS, met [with] Lord Anderson discuss the Report,
 5 particularly in the context of the recommendation for
 6 the Cabinet Office."

7 Is that right?

8 A. That's correct.

9 Q. Thank you. So if we can pick that up in the original
 10 document, please. It is CAB000026. This is a briefing
 11 for the meeting I think.

12 If we look top of the meeting we will see "Steer"
 13 and so on, so we can see it is a pre-meeting briefing.
 14 Then under "Key context". Still on page 1 please:

15 "The Home Office Prevent team, who know
 16 Lord Anderson well, ..."

17 I shan't spare his blushes:

18 "... tells us that he is easy to work with, candid,
 19 and that he will be happy to provide more feedback on
 20 the recommendation specific to the Cabinet Office."

21 All right, but then:

22 "The Home Office also indicated that they did not
 23 advise him that the work on the gateway required
 24 a Cabinet Office taskforce to lead it and that he
 25 reached this view himself."

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1 bullet point:

2 "A key recommendation is that a taskforce should be
 3 set up in the Cabinet Office to take forward work to
 4 connect Prevent to a wider safeguarding system ..."

5 The first sub-bullet point:

6 "It is highlighted that this should not be done in
 7 a single 'line' department due to the complexity ..."

8 So I think that is referring to Lord Anderson's
 9 explanation of that. Then:

10 "... are you able to provide", I think is a question
 11 that might be asked to Lord Anderson: why are you saying
 12 Cabinet Office to take it forward? But then this:

13 "You ..."

14 That's, I think, your boss:

15 "You may wish to flag some of the resourcing
 16 constraints and the [Cabinet Office] Futures approach,
 17 both of which make accepting the recommendation
 18 challenging."

19 Can you help to explain that? What is the "Cabinet
 20 Office Futures approach" and why would that make the
 21 Cabinet Office taking the coordination role challenging?

22 A. So I think it is sometimes assumed that the Cabinet
 23 Office is rather like the lead Government department of
 24 all lead Government departments, when in reality, as
 25 I set out in my witness statement, we are much more

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1 So that speaks for itself, but plainly, when it is
 2 being suggested that there should be a Cabinet
 3 Office-led taskforce, a relevant question is: where did
 4 this come from? And the answer seems to be
 5 Lord Anderson's independent thinking. Then the second
 6 bullet point:

7 "The Home Office continue to highlight that their
 8 spending review settlement makes new, ambitious
 9 programmes difficult. In the short-term, they are
 10 pursuing zero- and low-cost options (such as local
 11 engagement to understand barriers to treating VFIs, or
 12 a letter from the Home Secretary to encourage
 13 prioritisation), whilst working up more high cost
 14 options (such as the Prevention Gateway)."

15 So just pausing there. Should we understand it
 16 that, in reality, this was giving a bit of a warning,
 17 not to over-promise because the Home Office were saying
 18 this is actually very difficult from a financial point
 19 of view?

20 A. Yes, I think that's right. In a meeting of this sort
 21 between my director and Lord Anderson, I think it would
 22 have been unlikely for her to have wanted to propose
 23 new, higher ambitious options anyway, but yes, you are
 24 correct.

25 Q. Thank you. Then under "Key questions" we see, second

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1 a convener at the centre of Government, helping to
 2 unblock things, push things forwards where we can, but
 3 not having the resources or the -- not having the
 4 resources of a full lead Government department.

5 The Cabinet Office -- and we can get you the precise
 6 numbers of people who work in the Cabinet Office, if
 7 that would be helpful -- is actually relatively small
 8 compared to other lead Government departments, so
 9 setting out the sort of difference in approach. At this
 10 point in time, my team, the resources I had working on
 11 VFIs were three people, including myself. They weren't
 12 dedicated to VFIs. They had other work that they had to
 13 do. So it was a pretty small team that was working on
 14 this at that point. So that's, I think, some of the
 15 resourcing constraints.

16 The Cabinet Office's futures approach was then, as
 17 I recall -- I think there had been a history of the
 18 Cabinet Office taking on taskforces to do this, that and
 19 the other and I think what the Cabinet Office's futures
 20 approach was trying to get at was actually reducing the
 21 number of things that were being absorbed by the centre
 22 and trying to ensure that lead Government departments
 23 took on responsibility, even for sort of complex,
 24 cross-cutting things themselves.

25 So to say that we wanted to create a Cabinet Office

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1 taskforce, along the lines that Lord Anderson was
 2 recommended, was going slightly against the grain of
 3 that approach to try and push more things, more policy
 4 areas back out to lead Government departments.
 5 Q. Thank you. Again, I'm afraid, in very much my
 6 layperson's thinking, would that be emphasising that
 7 there's nothing wrong in, in particular, the big
 8 departments of State, like the Home Office, leading on
 9 cross-cutting work; they should have the power and the
 10 influence to do that?
 11 A. They absolutely should and most of Government is done in
 12 that way. The Cabinet Office steps in where there are
 13 very particular blockers that we need to help unlock.
 14 Q. Thank you. Let's just go over the page CAB000026_0002.
 15 I wanted to pick up on the last of the bullet points at
 16 the top of the page. So continuing the list:
 17 "DNSA ..."
 18 Deputy National Security Adviser?
 19 A. That is correct.
 20 Q. "... is sceptical that the Prevention Gateway is the
 21 (only) answer, and thinks that a legal power to compel
 22 public service providers to prioritise the VFI cohort is
 23 required. He felt Lord Anderson was not fully aware of
 24 how [local authorities] make decisions on
 25 prioritisation. You could explore during the meeting

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1 A. Yes.
 2 Q. Again, if I can weave in here some questions from the
 3 victims teams. So they ask, firstly: how could it be
 4 right that only zero or low-cost options were being
 5 considered for action here when there was a significant
 6 evolving risk to the public which had been identified?
 7 A. I think that is properly a matter for the Home Office.
 8 As I have set out, when it comes to resourcing
 9 decisions, it is a conversation between the lead
 10 Government department and the Treasury. When the
 11 Treasury has made its departmental allocation, it is
 12 then for the lead Government department to decide how
 13 that allocation is distributed.
 14 Q. And they ask that, given that Lord Anderson made
 15 a specific, reasoned recommendation for a Cabinet Office
 16 taskforce, given that that was an independent
 17 recommendation, why did the Cabinet Office not act on
 18 that recommendation and lead the work? I have touched
 19 on that in my own questions but can you assist in answer
 20 to that specific question?
 21 A. So in the sense that we engaged on the question, and
 22 considered the question, and worked with the Home Office
 23 on the question of where that taskforce was best to sit,
 24 I think it is not true that we didn't engage with the
 25 question or with the recommendation from Lord Anderson's

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1 Lord Anderson's views on the comparative merits of
 2 a legal power."
 3 Do you know what became of that alternative way
 4 forward, the idea that there might be a legal power to
 5 compel public service providers at the local authority
 6 level to prioritise VFIs?
 7 A. Yes. We received legal advice that that would not be
 8 the best way forward to promote prioritisation. In
 9 fact, it could even be counterproductive in the sense
 10 that if you had a legal power to prioritise one cohort,
 11 it would slightly open the precedent for other legal
 12 powers to prioritise other cohorts and then you get into
 13 the difficulty that I set out earlier, that you just
 14 have competing cohorts that require prioritisation. So
 15 we got some interim legal advice on that.
 16 Q. Thank you. Then, Dr Abbott, if we may then go back to
 17 your statement at page 21 CAB000003_0021, paragraph 72,
 18 having looked at the source document.
 19 You come to it at the end of the paragraph:
 20 "Ultimately, it was considered that the Home Office
 21 was best-placed to lead, consistent with its role as
 22 lead department, its relevant policy expertise and
 23 dedicated resources, and the respective roles of the
 24 Home Office and Cabinet Office described above."
 25 Yes?

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1 report. It was just considered that the Home Office,
 2 with its considerably greater resources and policy
 3 expertise, was actually better placed to lead the work
 4 than putting it in the Cabinet Office.
 5 Q. Thank you. Let's go forward then in time, please, to
 6 the 27 August of last year, so 27 August, 2025. You
 7 explain -- sir, for your note, it is paragraph 73 of the
 8 statement, just below where we are now, that there was
 9 advice to the Prime Minister, Dr Abbott, which you
 10 cleared. Can we go to that. It is CAB000033. If we
 11 can have the top third of the page down to the bottom of
 12 the summary; that's perfect. So we can see it is from,
 13 name redacted, but cleared by you. The date is
 14 27 August. I will read the summary, if I may:
 15 "Following the trial of [AR], and again at the NSC
 16 in March, you said that the Southport attack must be
 17 'a line in the sand'. Despite this, progress in
 18 implementing the NSC actions has been mixed. NSS has
 19 convened a series of regular stock-takes to challenge
 20 and assure the work led by the Home Office, and the
 21 Cabinet Secretary and DNSA have both engaged personally
 22 to drive progress. But the ..."
 23 There are some words redacted:
 24 "... combined with the technical complexity of some
 25 aspects of the work (spread across Departments, relying

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1 on local and regional delivery and not fully funded at
 2 the [Spending Review]) has slowed progress. Given
 3 this ..."
 4 Then in bold:
 5 "... we recommend you write to the Security
 6 Minister, asking him to take personal ownership to Chair
 7 a series of Ministerial meetings to ensure work
 8 progresses with sufficient ambition to enable the
 9 Government to demonstrate progress when it responds to
 10 Phase One of the Southport Inquiry in January."
 11 Yes?
 12 **A.** Yes.
 13 **Q.** Thank you. Then under "Context" in paragraph 2:
 14 "The first hearings in the Southport Inquiry,
 15 chaired by Sir Adrian ... have taken place, with initial
 16 recommendations from Phase One ... expected in January.
 17 Following that, we expect the Home Secretary will
 18 respond to its recommendations as well as to those in
 19 Lord Anderson's report on the Southport and Amess cases
 20 (she does not wish to prejudice the Inquiry by
 21 commenting sooner)."
 22 But then in bold:
 23 "Unless there is an immediate step-change in
 24 approach, we will not have good progress to
 25 demonstrate."

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1 below thresholds review and matters of that kind.
 2 Then 5:
 3 "Prevent itself is now better equipped to deal with
 4 potential VFI cases which show signs of some terrorist
 5 ideology ..."
 6 Note the emphasis:
 7 "... with Channel developing new interventions to
 8 support a more diverse cohort ..."
 9 You have also received separate advice on measures
 10 of online safety, yes?
 11 **A.** Yes.
 12 **Q.** So, without overlooking those, if we go to the
 13 outstanding challenges, paragraph 7, please -- and this,
 14 perhaps, comes to a kernel of the difficulties:
 15 "The key challenge with Prevent remains that it is
 16 enshrined in law as an explicitly counter
 17 terrorism-terrorism programme. Cases need to have at
 18 least some sign of an ideology to be adopted for
 19 intervention, and even then interventions are currently
 20 designed for would-be terrorists, not VFIs. Despite
 21 best efforts to get the system to adapt (including the
 22 reforms highlighted to ensure it does not miss cases
 23 which are less obviously ideological), we cannot expect
 24 Prevent in its current incarnation to take on most
 25 VFIs -- so the progress highlighted above addresses the

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1 Now, the previous paragraph referred to progress
 2 being mixed. The sentence "unless there is immediate
 3 step-change in approach, we will not have good progress
 4 to demonstrate" was warning the Prime Minister that
 5 progress had been relatively limited, was it not?
 6 **A.** Yes, I think that is true.
 7 **Q.** There's a "Progress to date" section. I must try to
 8 cover both sides of the coin, so I don't want to
 9 overlook this but the progress to date:
 10 "There has been some positive progress ...
 11 Assessment of the VFI cohort ... as well as [increasing]
 12 our understanding of risk factors ... how [they] overlap
 13 with other cohorts."
 14 Then paragraph 4: Prevent, major spike in
 15 referrals, but crucial adaptations to work more
 16 effectively. So, updated guidance to case handlers on
 17 repeat referrals:
 18 "... cases involving fascination with violence or
 19 mass casualty attacks ..."
 20 Over the page CAB000033_0002:
 21 "Take forward wider reviews and pilots [on] how
 22 Prevent operates."
 23 If you will forgive me, I'm not going to go into the
 24 detail of that because it was explored with the Home
 25 Office, involves the Prevent thresholds review, the

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1 weaknesses in the Prevent framework but cannot address
 2 the full spectrum of VFI risk."
 3 So just pausing there. That's the sense of Prevent
 4 being statute-bound by the test of vulnerability to
 5 being drawn into terrorism, would you agree?
 6 **A.** Correct.
 7 **Q.** Was consideration given to deliberately widening that
 8 and further resourcing Prevent?
 9 **A.** Some consideration was given to that, including with the
 10 Home Office, and as we have seen with some of the pilots
 11 and some of the changes that were made to Prevent in
 12 December 2024 and early 2025, Prevent I think has
 13 started to take on some of these cases. But Prevent can
 14 only be part of the solution, not the whole solution and
 15 I think that, as you say, gets to the kernel of what the
 16 problem is, is that Prevent is an obvious place for
 17 people to refer individuals of concern into, but we
 18 cannot have a situation, I think, where everybody of
 19 concern is linked to a counter terrorism programme.
 20 **Q.** Right, then in paragraph 8:
 21 "Delivering on the request you set out during the
 22 NSC of prioritising the existing 'stock' of VFIs for
 23 access to key services such as social care and mental
 24 health treatment has proven challenging."
 25 The reasons given:

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1 "... partly due to (a) the technical challenge of
2 how to prioritise people who ostensibly pose no
3 terrorist risk (and therefore should not be labelled as
4 a Prevent case when referred to other services) ..."

5 Can you help with what the technical challenge is
6 referring to there?

7 **A.** I will have to come back to you on that.

8 **Q.** "... (b) the slightly nebulous understanding of what
9 constitutes a VFI ..."

10 So that's the definitional problem, would you agree?

11 **A.** I do.

12 **Q.** Yes:

13 "... (c) the significant shift required to
14 prioritise cases based on risk to others rather than
15 risk to themselves. We are considering whether a legal
16 power is needed to compel prioritisation (though
17 Departments believe that de facto many VFIs are
18 prioritised due to existing guidance or duties, with
19 further engagement and guidance planned to understand
20 and address additional barriers)."

21 That sense of a significant shift required to
22 prioritise cases based on risk to others rather than
23 risk to themselves, what agency was in mind there?

24 **A.** I think it is probably a whole set of agencies that come
25 across individuals of concern. I think the sense was,

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1 to get all of those different programmes and projects to
2 be seen as one whole, in reducing the overall pool of
3 people who might be vulnerable to becoming a VFI. And
4 that progress is slow, in part because of the complexity
5 and the multiplicity of different programmes across that
6 landscape.

7 **Q.** So the Inquiry, just to take a few examples, has seen
8 obviously preventative partnerships is one. We know of
9 action being taken of multi-agency child protection
10 teams having a greater emphasis in the 2026 reforms.
11 Violence Reduction Units set up in some areas.
12 Potentially Dangerous Persons, again, set up in some
13 areas. It may risk unfairness, but in one view, this is
14 a complex patchwork of individual interventions, often
15 with announcements that something is being done. But is
16 this really a sense that they don't actually stitch
17 together to make a coherent whole?

18 **A.** I think that is absolutely correct.

19 **Q.** Thank you. Then 10:

20 "While better prioritisation of the cohort would be
21 a big step forward, a National Prevention Gateway would
22 enable a more robust process to track and assure these
23 cases in a more comprehensive way."

24 Then again, picking up the passages in bold:

25 "Successfully launching a new prevention gateway

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1 particularly at the centre at that point, was that
2 individuals were being prioritised primarily based on
3 risk that they posed to themselves rather than to others
4 and we wanted to challenge that and particularly from
5 a public safety point of view, re-balance the emphasis
6 onto those who present a risk to others. Although, as
7 the paper set out, departments seemed to think that that
8 was part of a prioritisation process already.

9 **Q.** Then in paragraph 9:

10 "... progress is also slow on measures to Prevent
11 minor VFIs emerging ..."

12 So that is the early intervention aspect, do you
13 agree?

14 **A.** I agree.

15 **Q.** Then over the page, please CAB000033_0003. In bold:

16 "... there is a lack of a combined cross-Government
17 view that all of this is part of a single picture and
18 that it requires a joint endeavour to succeed."

19 What is that seeking to identify?

20 **A.** I think what we are trying to identify here is that
21 there are a multiplicity of different Government
22 initiatives and programmes designed to stop people
23 entering into violent behaviour and more broadly, but
24 then they are more generally seen as separate and
25 isolated from each other. What we were trying to do was

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1 will require long-term, engaged Ministerial commitment
2 to drive it through the system, including securing
3 funding.

4 "Therefore, although Lord Anderson recommended the
5 Cabinet Office lead a Taskforce to scope the Gateway, we
6 recommend a cross-government effort spear-headed by the
7 Security Minister and contextualised within wider
8 efforts on VFIs is more likely to succeed."

9 If we look very briefly at "Next steps", we do not
10 get much help because there is a redaction on those at
11 the moment. But Dr Abbott, very helpfully, if we go
12 back to your statement, please, you helpfully just -- it
13 for us. So it is paragraph 75. So page 23
14 CAB000003_0023, paragraph 75. So:

15 "Although the Cabinet Secretary and the [DNSA] had
16 engaged personally to drive progress, the advice to the
17 [PM] was that 'the lack of an engaged Ministerial
18 champion, combined with the technical complexity and
19 cross-departmental nature of some aspects of the work'
20 had slowed progress."

21 Then the Secretariat:

22 "... recommended that a minister in the Home Office
23 be specifically tasked to ensure work progressed.
24 A draft letter setting out this request was submitted
25 alongside the advice."

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1 Now, did that happen?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. Well, it was submitted. Did the change, in fact,
4 happen?

5 A. No, it did not.

6 Q. So you say:

7 "Due to changes in ministerial portfolios shortly
8 thereafter, this specific request was not made."

9 Is that right?

10 A. We are not aware that the letter that we had submitted
11 was sent. However, it is the case that the Security
12 Minister's portfolio does include references to Violence
13 Fixated Individuals and, as I think you heard from
14 Mr Emmett, the Security Minister is briefed on this
15 issue.

16 Q. So should we read paragraph 75, the end of it, as not
17 being an indication that there was a decision not to
18 follow through on the principle of having a single
19 identified minister who would drive forward the
20 cross-departmental nature, it is more that the
21 individual letter didn't issue because there was about
22 to be a change of portfolios?

23 A. I can't say because of the latter point but, yes, in
24 principle.

25 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** I'm not sure I understand this. Are
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1 over a year ago, when was the revised suggestion as to
2 the Rt Hon Mr Jarvis' responsibilities put?

3 A. I'm not familiar with the details of that but we can
4 come back to you on the precise timings.

5 Q. That would be helpful, thank you very much.

6 Now, you set out in your statement that what did
7 result after this is what's termed a "policy sprint", is
8 that right?

9 A. That's correct.

10 Q. So if we look at page 23 CAB000003_0023, paragraph 77:

11 "Starting in early 2026, the Cabinet Office
12 especially barked upon a further concentrated period of
13 work on this issue given, as I have identified above,
14 that [National Security Secretariat] felt further, fixer
15 progress was needed."

16 Now, the briefing to the Prime Minister that we saw
17 was the tail end of August. And this sprint is starting
18 in early 2026. What was happening in the interim
19 period? Or was that something of a fallow period?

20 A. No, I don't think it was a fallow period. I mean,
21 during the sort of August to end of 2025 period, we
22 played our traditional role of coordinating and
23 convening the Home Office, providing challenge where we
24 could, to strengthen policy making and that included
25 a number of bilateral meetings with Home Office

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1 you saying, Dr Abbott, that the Security Minister has,
2 in fact, been made the minister responsible for driving
3 this forward or are you saying that it simply is one of
4 the things that is referred to in his portfolio and
5 about which he is briefed, which is something else
6 altogether? So which of the two of them is it?

7 A. In very recent advice, the Security Minister has agreed
8 to prioritise Violence Fixated Individuals as one of the
9 things that he is taking forward in his cross-government
10 capacity, as both a Home Office and a Cabinet Office
11 Minister. He has a double-hatted approach and one of
12 the items in his revised list of priorities is to focus
13 on Violence Fixated Individuals.

14 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** So that's something rather lesser than
15 what was originally anticipated in the draft letter?

16 A. That is correct. We had submitted the draft letter with
17 the specific hope that he would be tasked very, very
18 personally. That was not taken forward. I don't know
19 why that was not taken forward, Chair. But it is the
20 case that the Security Minister now has this specific
21 role to focus on Violence Fixated Individuals as part of
22 his double-hatted role as a Home Office and Cabinet
23 Office minister.

24 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Thank you.

25 **MR MOSS:** This advice, of 27 August, with this suggestion,
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1 colleagues, including the one with Mr Emmett, referred
2 to just in the paragraph preceding that.

3 It was also a period in which we were running
4 a process with the Home Office and DSIT as it was then,
5 to look at some of the online harms elements, which, as
6 we have discussed already, not all of them are relevant
7 to this but they support the overall work on VFIs.

8 Q. Thank you. Sir, for your note, it is paragraphs 78
9 through to 88 of Dr Abbott's statement that give the
10 full detail. Dr Abbott, again, if you will forgive me,
11 I'm just going to pick up some key headlines, looking
12 particularly at the outputs from this. So if we could
13 go over the page, please, to look at page 28
14 CAB000003_0028 at paragraph 79. You say:

15 "On 26 February ... the Cabinet Office commissioned
16 departments to send questions to service providers in
17 their sectors, to inform workshops on understanding how
18 VFIs are managed in local areas."

19 Partly so we have it in our evidence set, can we
20 just look at the returns, please. So the first of them
21 is CAB000035, and we see that this is a summary of key
22 points raised in the responses from the Association of
23 Directors of Children's Services members. So the author
24 of those is plain on the face of it, yes?

25 A. Yes.

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1 Q. Sir, as you know, we have Ms Graham coming tomorrow who
2 can speak to this. Then if we can have CAB000038,
3 please. We see initial responses from the Association
4 of Directors of Children's Services based on some recent
5 discussions. So that may have been an earlier document
6 but coming from the same source, do you agree?

7 A. Agreed.

8 Q. Without criticism, there is a somewhat confusing
9 document at CAB000037, which is the third of those that
10 you have helpfully identified as being a return. This
11 is just headed:

12 "VFIs: understanding of local approaches."

13 And various questions -- I'm not going to go through
14 the full detail of these. But we see various questions
15 set out and the responses, with different font colours.
16 It is quite hard -- you can look at some aspects of it
17 and I think it seems to have a policing lead and so on.
18 Do you, in fact, know what the colours signify in this
19 document?

20 A. Yes. So I apologise this is not clearer. Clearly,
21 these are internal documents.

22 Q. Understood.

23 A. My understanding is the different colours relate to
24 different Government departments. We are clarifying
25 that and we will come back to the Inquiry with the

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1 across local areas ..."

2 Yes?

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. So definitions being raised as a problem but, at least
5 in terms of the guidance, encouraged not to be overly
6 prescriptive, would you agree?

7 A. Agreed.

8 Q. Thank you. Then second bullet point:

9 "A key issue for VFIs is they sometimes do not meet
10 the threshold for intervention in a single sector ..."

11 Again, I'm taking it reasonably quickly because
12 these are by now familiar themes. So they may fall
13 below thresholds for intervention by social care or
14 below thresholds for CAMHS or potentially, for
15 particular support in education. I think that was being
16 flagged up as a high-level concern, would you agree?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. Then parental consent:

19 "... case studies where the support and
20 interventions were available for a child but a lack of
21 parental consent or withdrawal of ... consent at
22 critical points meant [the] child was not able to access
23 the support they needed."

24 Again, familiar theme, I think?

25 A. Agreed.

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1 specifics.

2 Q. Thank you. So I think you confirmed that was something
3 that was raised over the weekend?

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. I do not think you have an immediate answer but if that
6 could be added to the proverbial homework list, we would
7 be very grateful.

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. Then we detail -- sir, for your note, don't need to turn
10 it up, it is paragraph 81 of your statement, Dr Abbott,
11 that there was a workshop in Birmingham on
12 31 March 2026. We have the read-out of that, CAB000048.
13 We can ignore the top half of the page. If we go to the
14 "Hi everyone". So:

15 "Thank you for your attendance ... with the workshop
16 on Tuesday ..."

17 I just want to pick out some of the high-level views
18 that were being expressed. So we see in the first
19 bullet point:

20 "On the whole, it would be useful to have some
21 national guidance that includes an agreed definition of
22 VFIs and the aggravating risk factors that are common
23 across cases. This guidance should be prescriptive on
24 what threats we are trying to tackle, but not too
25 prescriptive on how to tackle them given differences

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1 Q. Yes, over the page CAB000048_0002. The first fresh
2 bullet point on this page:

3 "A clear theme across case studies and the
4 discussions is the online environment as a key driver
5 and catalyst for these individuals. In our policy
6 response to the online space we need to be more
7 sophisticated in differentiating exactly what we mean,
8 as the internet is so broad. For example, the risk from
9 someone using Discord/Telegram/Roblox or someone who is
10 sent on a path to more extreme content because of the
11 algorithm are very different to someone using social
12 media in a more benign way."

13 So again, flagging up there the online environment.

14 Without any indication of caveats, we are not sure
15 about the harm, a key driver and catalyst for these
16 individuals. That's the feedback?

17 A. Yes, and if I may, you know, the fact of these workshops
18 at local level and delivered in the way these were
19 delivered, it was relatively unusual for a Cabinet
20 Office team, particularly in the National Security
21 Secretariat to go out into the regions and consult with
22 local practitioners in this way. We were very conscious
23 of the fact that we sat in Whitehall and our training
24 was not such that we would understand the dynamics at
25 a local level. So we wanted to use these opportunities

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1 to really understand how our policy making could be
 2 better informed by the views and the experiences of
 3 local practitioners.

4 **Q.** Thank you. So a point about the risk about decisions
 5 being risk averse because practitioners having to
 6 potentially defend every decision that they make. Then
 7 as to the Big Front Door -- my words, not those used in
 8 the note -- it says that:

9 "While a single system is desirable for ensuring
 10 oversight of children across all services, this has been
 11 in discussion for [over] 30 ... years with limited
 12 progress. There was mixed feedback as to whether
 13 a Lord Anderson Prevention Gateway style model is
 14 needed ..."

15 Then, if we look at the reason for that:
 16 "... some felt it already somewhat exists through
 17 [MASH], whereas others felt it is a necessary tool to
 18 ensure that we are capturing all threats."

19 Then there was an undertaking from the NSS to ensure
 20 that local Government is included in the conversations.

21 Was anything more done at this stage to analyse that
 22 what may be a slightly mixed picture about -- across
 23 different areas, which MASH are close to doing it
 24 already and which are not?

25 **A.** There was not sustained work taken forward to do

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1 that was too narrow would exclude certain VFIs that then
 2 would not be picked up by the system.

3 **Q.** Thank you. There is a reference at the end of that
 4 bullet:

5 "Rather looking at those cohorts in silos, we need
 6 to look at high harm, high risk, high vulnerability
 7 cohort as one, as the interventions are often similar."

8 Do you know whether that was referring to Prevent
 9 ideological terrorism cases as well, that need to be
 10 looked at as one rather than in silos, or is that about
 11 treating those outside of Prevent in silos?

12 **A.** My understanding is this didn't refer to Prevent or not
 13 to Prevent. I think what they were trying to get at was
 14 that rather than breaking it down into a VFI cohort over
 15 here and a Prevent cohort over here, you look at, as it
 16 says, at high harm, high risk, high vulnerability across
 17 everybody who is within the system who presents to those
 18 particular definitions.

19 **Q.** Thank you. Then, again emphasis in the second bullet
 20 point "national guidance would be helpful", but in
 21 Manchester, third point:

22 "Overall, attendees feel there isn't the need for
 23 a 'big front door' Prevention Gateway as the systems and
 24 processes are well-established across Greater Manchester
 25 and [MASH] operate as the 'big front door' at the

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1 a comparative study of different Multi-Agency
 2 Safeguarding Hubs, although we did recognise, as the
 3 feedback here suggests, that the picture nationally is
 4 very different from place to place and indeed, we picked
 5 that up in the subsequent workshop which took place in
 6 Manchester.

7 **Q.** All right. Again, for the learned Chair's note,
 8 paragraph 82 in your statement is where you deal with
 9 that. We can go straight to the note of it. This is
 10 19 May, the Manchester workshop. It is CAB000049.

11 Some similarities but some nuanced differences. So
 12 again, we can ignore the top half and go to the bottom
 13 half. So here "mixed views" in bold:

14 "... on whether a definition would be useful. Some
 15 were for a definition as it allows practitioners to know
 16 the boundaries ... but this can then become
 17 exclusionary."

18 Apart from the note here, have you gained
 19 an understanding of what the concerns are about -- for
 20 those who would be against a definition? Why would it
 21 become exclusionary?

22 **A.** I think -- and the Inquiry has heard already -- that the
 23 VFI cohort is not a homogeneous cohort and VFIs can
 24 present in very, very different ways in different
 25 sectors. I think there were concerns that a definition

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1 moment."

2 Did your team get a sense whether that included
 3 adults or was only for those only under 18?

4 **A.** I think we got the sense that it was for adults as well,
 5 although the focus was largely for those under 18.

6 I think, as I set out in my statement, we are very
 7 conscious of the fact that these two workshops only
 8 reflect the combined wisdom of two rather large local
 9 authorities that presumably have quite a lot of
 10 experience in working in this area and, therefore, the
 11 picture nationally might be rather different. So we
 12 would be cautious about drawing large-scale conclusions
 13 from just these two.

14 **Q.** I understand, thank you. Then over the page
 15 CAB000049_0002. Again, familiar theme for the Inquiry's
 16 work:

17 "Many attendees felt that the risk to the subject is
 18 often considered more than risk to others. Though some
 19 highlighted that though they will flex, risk to others
 20 vs risk to self are not polarised positions. It was
 21 also highlighted that gender can play into this."

22 So that sense of "some highlighted though that they
 23 will flex", do you know what that was referring to?

24 **A.** I think it was simply that where local providers are
 25 working with an individual, they will not be bound to

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1 just focus on risk to self, they will also be able to
 2 take into account the risk that some individuals pose to
 3 others as well. So I think that is the flex point
 4 there.

5 **Q.** Thank you. Then the next bullet point emphasises that,
 6 although -- there was discussion around suitable
 7 interventions, and:
 8 "... though the default seems to be specialist
 9 treatment, these individuals actually need more
 10 wrap-around support including strong family background,
 11 a community, local social/sports clubs."

12 Now, the bit in bold speaks for itself but the bit
 13 about "the default seems to be specialist treatment", do
 14 you know what that's referring to?

15 **A.** I think the sense here is that when professionals reach
 16 for guidance and reach for some understanding of what
 17 interventions are available, they tend to focus on, as
 18 it says here, specialist treatment, rather than simply
 19 making sure that the individual in question has a wide
 20 set of protective factors within the community, within
 21 his or her family. And so it is wanting to look at
 22 the -- I think this came through very strongly -- it is
 23 wanting to make sure that the child or the adult in
 24 question is looked at holistically, that all the
 25 circumstances of their life are taken into account, not

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1 raised through the systems and communicate the
 2 requirements from local government up to central
 3 government ..."

4 Then the phrase:
 5 "... (ie they don't always need a big shiny
 6 announcement)."

7 What is that referring to?

8 **A.** I think that this is referring to is a theme you have
 9 heard throughout this Inquiry, including from your
 10 expert witnesses, Chair, that the hard end, the pointy
 11 end of this problem is felt at local level and
 12 individual practitioners, many of whom will be under
 13 considerable pressure, working with reduced resources,
 14 are having to make decisions day in day out and that
 15 their feeling is I think that central Government in
 16 Whitehall doesn't necessarily understand the
 17 difficulties that they are operating under, both from
 18 a resource point of view and in terms of the complexity
 19 of the landscape, the complexity of the statutory
 20 arrangements and I think a worry, perhaps there in that
 21 parenthetical, that central Government will reach for
 22 a big policy solution, whereas actually what they think
 23 they need, and they say they need, is more resource,
 24 more trust in their expertise, at a local level. And
 25 that was really why we tried to do these workshops, to

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1 just perhaps potentially the sort of clinical
 2 particularities.

3 **Q.** Thank you. Then emphasis in the penultimate bullet on
 4 a shared language for risk assessments. Again, familiar
 5 theme to the Inquiry. Then:
 6 "There was feedback that there needs to be more join
 7 up at a central government level of the key departments
 8 in this space ..."

9 What was driving those sorts of observations? Can
 10 you help?

11 **A.** I mean, I think there are a number of people that we
 12 have spoken to would welcome some sort of national risk
 13 assessment tool, that could be used at local level, to
 14 enable them to triage and prioritise individuals
 15 accordingly, across a sort of national framework.
 16 I think the issue there is not whether an individual
 17 agency, for example, would be able to correctly
 18 prioritise or risk assess an individual and more whether
 19 the system as a whole is capable of considering and
 20 responding to the combined picture. It comes back to
 21 something I said right at the start, the importance of
 22 treating each individual holistically and that's what
 23 makes this such a challenging area to work in.

24 **Q.** Then there is a reference to:
 25 "... we need to manage the anxiety that is being

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1 get a sense of that and to avoid the compulsion to the
 2 big shiny announcement that's written there.

3 **Q.** Thank you. The victim's legal teams just pose simple
 4 questions: how were these locations identified and why
 5 were only two identified? Can you help on that?

6 **A.** Yes, so as I set out earlier, this was quite unusual for
 7 the National Security Secretariat to go out and talk to
 8 different regions. We are a small team, we still are
 9 a small team, with multiple areas of responsibility. We
 10 simply weren't able to do more than two workshops.
 11 These were quite time-consuming workshops to do. We
 12 chose the locations on the basis of feedback from other
 13 Government departments. I think we chose two locations
 14 who were quite good at what they did and if we had had
 15 more time and more capacity, I would have wanted to have
 16 gone to a more rural area, for example, or smaller urban
 17 centre where their experience in these kind of cases was
 18 more limited so we had something to compare these
 19 results against.

20 But absolutely, we would have wanted to have done
 21 this much more widely and indeed, this was a template
 22 that we had in mind to hand over to the Home Office as
 23 they stood up their NIEV structures and governance, for
 24 them to take forwards.

25 **Q.** Thank you. If we go back to your statement, please, and

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1 it is page 27 CAB000003_0027, paragraph 88. You say:
 2 "At the conclusion of the sprint, [the National
 3 Security Secretariat] produced a briefing entitled
 4 Violence fixated individuals -- going further.
 5 [Setting] out ... lessons from the sprint and made
 6 suggestions for the Home Office to take further ..."
 7 So before we go to that document, should we
 8 understand that this was -- taking a couple of forms.
 9 What had been learnt from the sprint but also, as it
 10 were, advice to the Home Office or somewhat handing over
 11 the baton and saying: these are areas for further
 12 consideration?
 13 A. Yes, it wasn't advice, it was suggestions I think, for
 14 further work that the NIEV Taskforce could take forward.
 15 I think the other interesting thing about this sprint,
 16 that we had taken on because we felt there needed to be
 17 a little bit of additional momentum, a little bit of
 18 additional work done to support that work already been
 19 done by the Home Office, was that we had agreed this
 20 advice across the whole range of social policy
 21 departments with the idea that those social policy
 22 departments would take our suggestions, put a sort of
 23 DfE capping paper, or a sort of DHSC capping paper, on
 24 top of them and put them up there in their respective
 25 systems. The idea being, as the Cabinet Office role has

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1 A. Correct.
 2 Q. Then (b):
 3 "Through the Home Office-led 'Below thresholds'
 4 pilot ... We have established that the referral process
 5 can work and that cases are sometimes picked up by those
 6 services, albeit that ..."
 7 Then over the page CAB000012_0003:
 8 "... Panels which formed part of the pilot provided
 9 greater assurance that cases were actually being
 10 addressed by those other services. But this was not
 11 comprehensive, so we need a more robust system to ensure
 12 this is consistently the case."
 13 Yes?
 14 A. Correct.
 15 Q. Then (c):
 16 "Through engagement with practitioners across the
 17 country ..."
 18 A reference, I think, to what we have just been
 19 looking at:
 20 "... we have established that in the absence of
 21 central guidance some local areas are developing
 22 a bottom-up approach to managing the risk from VFIs."
 23 Then:
 24 "In some places (eg Greater London) this is working
 25 better than others ..."

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1 always been, is to germinate, incubate policy ideas that
 2 other departments can then take on.
 3 Q. "Capping paper" meaning what exactly?
 4 A. I'm sorry. A capping paper is a sort of note that would
 5 go on top of another paper that would provide additional
 6 context, specific advice.
 7 Q. Thank you. So if we look at the paper, it is CAB000012,
 8 please. We can see, again, it is from name redacted,
 9 but cleared by you, and if we pick it up, please, at
 10 paragraph 3:
 11 "Ministers considered the subject of VFIs at an NSC
 12 discussion in March 2025 and agreed a four-pronged
 13 approach to managing the risk ..."
 14 We go through (a) through (d) which we are now
 15 familiar with. If we go on to paragraph 7, over the
 16 page, please CAB000012_0002. So points established by
 17 the sprint, we see:
 18 "Through the assessment work undertaken by HSAI on
 19 which interventions are most beneficial for tackling
 20 VFIs, we have an initial understanding of the protective
 21 factors which can prevent somebody becoming a VFI."
 22 Yes?
 23 A. Correct.
 24 Q. That's the Homeland Security Analysis and Insight team,
 25 I think?

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1 Is that right?
 2 A. Correct.
 3 Q. "But the challenge remains" and in bold:
 4 "... that there is a patchwork approach across the
 5 country because so much best-practice is based on the
 6 efforts of hard working, committed individuals."
 7 Yes?
 8 A. Correct.
 9 Q. Thank you. Then, if we just scroll down a little bit,
 10 to (d), please. No, forgive me, in paragraph 8:
 11 "Defining VFIs.
 12 "One of the key issues which continues to be raised
 13 with us is that an agreed and shared definition of VFIs
 14 is needed. The work led by the [Cabinet Office body] in
 15 the Cabinet Office last year agreed a definition but
 16 concluded that further work was needed precisely because
 17 a one-size-fits-all approach was unlikely to be
 18 effective."
 19 So is that partly what set up the work towards
 20 the -- that was done in the Home Office towards NIEV as
 21 an alternative?
 22 A. Yes. I think it's been a process of trying to reach
 23 a definition and you covered, with Mr Emmett, some of
 24 the reasons behind why they have chosen the term "NIEV"
 25 over "VFIs".

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1 Q. Thank you. Then, if we can have paragraph 9, please:

2 "On the other hand, in sectors which have
3 implemented specific guidance on what is meant by
4 VFIs ... feedback from practitioners suggests that this
5 has helped them in making risk-based judgements. For
6 example, [Counter Terrorism Police] have developed
7 guidance for those fascinated with [and then it is
8 underlined] committing acts of extreme violence or
9 a mass casualty act ..."

10 Now, that is something that I explored at length
11 with DAC Vicky Evans last week. Should we understand
12 from the emphasis to "committing", underlined there,
13 that the Cabinet Office had a picked up on that
14 difference of wording?

15 A. Yes, and, as you say, you explored this at length with
16 multiple witnesses, I think, this question of intent,
17 and I think the Cabinet Office and certainly my view
18 expressed to the Home Office is this concern around
19 audience as well. It may be you are coming to that,
20 whether indeed these individuals all act with regards to
21 some sort of audience and some sort of message that they
22 are trying to communicate through their act of extreme
23 violence and this is still a sort of point of
24 discussion. I think it is not a settled view, including
25 the question of intent. Because, of course, if you want

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1 "Departments work with their sectors to develop
2 specific guidance (as needed) on how to manage the risk
3 from VFIs."

4 But then, if we can just scroll down a little bit so
5 we have the next heading and paragraph 12:

6 "Critically" that's not my adding the word, it is
7 how paragraph 12 starts:

8 "Critically, we need these sector-specific
9 approaches to interact and work together effectively.
10 As feedback from local engagement has made clear, we
11 need to ensure our risk assessment of individual cases
12 is 'dynamic' ..."

13 So they are "not just referred out of Prevent but
14 also back into Prevent". Then paragraph 13, there is
15 reference to Lord Anderson's recommendation of embedding
16 Prevent in a wider safeguarding system:

17 "The case for this is that HMG needs a system
18 through which the collective risk of an individual can
19 be managed."

20 Then 14:

21 "We already have some structures like this in place:
22 local feedback is that Prevent often already acts as the
23 'big front door' ..."

24 Then over the page, please CAB000012_0005. The
25 recommendation in 14:

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1 to do effective preventative work, you need to be able
2 to get to people before they necessarily have catalysed
3 their thinking into some form of intent. So I think the
4 underlining of this word "committing" is just to remind
5 us that this is still a live conversation about where
6 you start to intervene.

7 Q. Thank you. Over the page, please CAB000012_0004, in 10:

8 "A definition underpinned by sector-specific
9 guidance would enable central government to set out the
10 problem which needs addressing -- while recognising that
11 there will be a range of local best practice ..."

12 So, if you will forgive me, I am going to come back
13 to that concept of sector-specific guidance when we look
14 at some forward-looking aspects, but we note it for now.

15 Then paragraph 11, the recommendation:

16 "We recommend that ...

17 "[the] Home Office reviews the existing definition
18 of VFIs and explores where it could be sharper ..."

19 Sharper in what sense?

20 A. I'm not sure "sharper" is precisely the right word. But
21 I think what we were trying to get at was that the Home
22 Office would find a definition that was capable of
23 slightly more widespread understanding and adoption by
24 agencies and departments.

25 Q. Then (b):

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1 "We recommend that:

2 "Home Office, working with local partners, designs
3 a system for managing the risks from VFIs."

4 A model for interventions, if we can scroll down
5 a little bit, we see, at 16(a), as a further
6 recommendation. So "we recommend that":

7 "Home Office [utilises] existing interventions and
8 systems where possible, develops a model to provide
9 support ..."

10 If we then scroll down to paragraph 20, over the
11 page CAB000012_0006, other areas that we have touched on
12 with the Home Office. But the recommendation is:

13 "... we recommend that the Home Office:

14 "(a) Develops options on how we can ensure more VFIs
15 consent to interventions -- recognising this would have
16 applicability for other interventions;

17 "[and] (b) Expedites work on options for a civil
18 order, with a view to retaining optionality to legislate
19 in this Parliament if needed."

20 The overall "next steps":

21 "The Home Office is establishing a team to take
22 forward work on VFIs, but it will require buy-in across
23 Government, building on the best practice we are already
24 seeing at a local level. We recommend that the Home
25 Office coordinates the work set out in this advice, and

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also works with departments to issue some overarching public communications to sectors, prior to the bespoke sector-specific guidance issuing."

Now, there are a range of matters being passed back to the Home Office there. What's your reflection on the level of progress that was actually made by the Cabinet Office on the big issues and the big resolution issues, while the Cabinet Office was coordinating?

A. So, the Cabinet Office, as I have already set out, is not the lead Government department on this. What we were trying to do, in this period over the course of the policy sprint, was to inject a little bit more momentum, bring some -- what we hoped were helpful ideas to the Home Office's consideration of these issues. They were focusing on standing up their dedicated resource, which I think was stood up in around April time of this year. And so this was the sum total of the work that we did with local areas. We wanted to use this opportunity to talk to -- as I have said, to talk to local practitioners and get some -- give them the opportunity to feed up some of their ideas which we distilled into this note, which I then gave to the Home Office and I sent to other departments as well, as a way of trying to inject a little bit more momentum and pace.

As I have said before, the Cabinet Office role is --

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for different lead Government departments. Our job can only be to press for progress against those policy objectives.

Q. Thank you. Sir, I was going to turn next to a topic on the work of the Cabinet Office body, as we are calling it, on definitions. But I'm conscious of the time. Could I just indicate for your note, sir, that between paragraphs 94 and 123, Dr Abbott gives a very useful narrative summary of that. But the definitions themselves have been explored with others. I'm going to go to the substance of it, rather than the chronology?

SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: I quite agree.

MR MOSS: Dr Abbott, thank you for the detail in relation to that.

We will pick up, if we may, on my fourth topic: themes from the Cabinet Office policy work. And can we start with that point about definitions, without necessarily going through the chronology.

So, we know that the original VFI definition arose out of the work of that Cabinet Office body, and if we can have Mr Emmett's statement back up, at HOM000964 at page 55 HOM000964_0055. We know -- and it is not raised critically -- that Government has now moved away from that and we can see, at the bottom of 155:

" RICU and HSAI have now conducted research to test

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you know, we can press and press lead Government departments, we can unlock some things, we can influence on other things. Ultimately, it is down to the lead Government department to take forward these ideas. That is why this was offered in the spirit of co-operation but also kind of ideas for them to take forwards.

Q. One understands that, but it might be said that the Cabinet Office had been playing a coordinating role and then had done the sprint, as you have explained it, and of course the Home Office was to be the lead department and of course the Home Office would, even before that, have clearly had an important role as one of the Government departments most involved. But a critical suggestion from all of this may be that the Cabinet Office hadn't made much progress in actually coming to a conclusion on some of the big ticket items. So, for example: should there be a Big Front Door? Nor in some of the very difficult, and admittedly complex aspects, of concrete further steps in online harms. Or in the area of actually working out, at local authority level, what the prioritisation should look like. So what pathway should that be. What do you say to that?

A. I would say that none of those are actually directly responsibilities that the Cabinet Office hold. Those are all responsibilities, those items that you raise,

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the application of the VFI definition ..."

Over the page HOM000964_0056:

"They found [that the Cabinet Office body] definition of VFI presents significant limitations and would likely need to be altered to be operationalised in an early intervention context such as Prevent."

Then these words:

"In particular, assessing intent to commit extreme violence at the Prevent stage is inherently uncertain: it relates to someone's mental state; insufficient information about an individual's online activity is a general issue; and in any event, as Prevent is an early intervention programme, intent would not be expected to be fully formed, present or identifiable, and thus application is inconsistent."

He went on to say, in 156:

"There is broad consensus across government and policing intelligence and analytical teams that violence fascination may be better conceptualised as one feature, that can fit within a broader NIEV framework, rather than a standalone category ..."

If we then scroll down to the bottom of the page, we see, at 157 -- and you will be familiar with these concepts, I know -- but 159:

"The "essential components":

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1 "The Act.
 2 "Extreme violence.
 3 "The purpose.
 4 "No clear ideological purpose."
 5 But also:
 6 "(Explicit or implicit) intent to shock, intimidate
 7 or outrage a wider audience."
 8 Then over the page HOM000964_0057, without going
 9 through material that by now is familiar, we see that
 10 Mr Emmett gave further information about each of those
 11 three components: the act; the purpose; and the intent
 12 to shock, intimidate or outrage wider audience.
 13 So what is the Cabinet Office's thinking in relation
 14 to this? Is the revised definition seen as appropriate,
 15 so far as the Cabinet Office is concerned?
 16 A. So, in some ways -- and I go back to what I said
 17 a moment or two ago -- the responsibility for coming up
 18 with a definition lies with the lead Government
 19 department. The Cabinet Office can have views, but it
 20 is for the Home Office to come up with a definition that
 21 works.
 22 There is clearly still quite a range of opinion on
 23 the way that we define this particular cohort. It
 24 remains, I think, complex and contested. I think, if
 25 I can go back to some of the work of the Cabinet Office

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1 process of working with the Home Office on this, but it
 2 is their definition to operationalise.
 3 Q. Thank you. That's helpful.
 4 If we look at the interim guidance on this,
 5 HOM001011. If we can go to paragraph 6 please it is on
 6 page 2 HOM001011_0002. Just note, again, there is
 7 a risk, when taking things quickly, that one risks
 8 unfairness. Paragraph 5, the interim guidance, first of
 9 all:
 10 "... is not intended to pre-judge the outcome of
 11 Phase 2 of the Southport Inquiry."
 12 So it's not being suggested that this is a once and
 13 for all position, but paragraph 6:
 14 "We have developed ..."
 15 Again, the words are:
 16 "... a working definition of NIEV for the purposes
 17 of this guidance and to support the development of
 18 relevant policies for managing NIEV risks. The
 19 definition is not statutory, legal, or operational in
 20 nature."
 21 Then it is set out:
 22 "The use or threat of extreme violence, not driven
 23 by a clear ideological purpose, which is communicative
 24 in nature and intended to shock, intimidate or outrage
 25 the public or a section of the public."

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1 body that we have referred to, they said that a good
 2 working definition of VFIs should neither be too broad
 3 nor too narrow. It should drive the right interventions
 4 and it should be elegant and simple. And the Cabinet
 5 Office's view is that we would follow all three of
 6 those.

7 We also want to make sure -- and this is in line
 8 with it not being too narrow -- that it shouldn't
 9 exclude a particular category of individuals. My view
 10 is that -- and I think I would tend to agree with
 11 Professor Cassam, who has looked at this in some detail
 12 and has talked to the Inquiry about his views -- is that
 13 the third aspect of the Home Office definition, the
 14 intent to shock, intimidate or outrage a wider audience,
 15 is potentially exclusionary, in the sense that there may
 16 well be some individuals -- and I think
 17 Professor Cassam's view was that AR might have been one
 18 of these individuals -- who did not necessarily have
 19 a particular audience in mind, or that if he did, we
 20 didn't know what it was.

21 So, I think, to the point of the Cabinet Office's
 22 body's view on simplicity and elegance, I think this is
 23 both -- adds additional layers and is potentially
 24 exclusionary. And the Home Office know my views on this
 25 because we have fed them in as part of the ongoing

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1 Then, if we do go over the page, please
 2 HOM001011_0003, the guidance goes on to deal with:
 3 "Current research on NIEV ..."
 4 Now, one factor that we explored with Mr Emmett in
 5 relation to that, is it doesn't have the subsequent
 6 paragraphs giving colour and guidance to the meaning of
 7 that. In fairness to the Home Office, obviously you
 8 have to make a judgement call on how much detail to go
 9 into, but if we go to the bottom, again, of the previous
 10 page HOM001011_0002, thank you.
 11 That exclusionary aspect, in particular, if you
 12 don't have the guidance on in particular on "implicit
 13 intention to shock, intimidate or outrage", would you
 14 agree that that definition risks setting the bar
 15 potentially too high and excluding a relevant part of
 16 the cohort of concern?
 17 A. Yes, I do. But I think it is important to set out here
 18 what a big step forward this interim guidance is and
 19 I think it is really important that the Home Office has
 20 gone into print in the way that they have and has
 21 attempted to provide some guidance to operational
 22 partners because, as we have seen, that has been one of
 23 the difficulties so far.

24 It is interim guidance, the Home Office are clear
 25 that this is evolving, so I am sure it will continue to

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1 evolve as we work our way forwards.

2 **Q.** Thank you. So that sense that we have seen, feedback of

3 a lack of national guidance, if we just go over the page

4 and then if we can zoom out so that we have whole pages.

5 If we just go over the page again HOM001011_0004.

6 We see, don't we, some case studies being given of

7 practical good practice from local authorities. I think

8 if we go over the page HOM001011_0005. Again, we see

9 another one, in fact from Birmingham, where one of the

10 workshops was. So, giving encouragement, as we explored

11 with Mr Emmett, to make the best use of local provision,

12 even though they may vary, I think you would see as

13 a good thing and appropriate as an interim measure?

14 **A.** Yes and in fact, it was our recommendation from the

15 Cabinet Office that these case studies be included in

16 this guidance precisely to give some visibility to the

17 good work that's been going on in local areas and to

18 give other local areas that might not have had so much

19 experience in it some sense of: oh, that's how maybe we

20 can go about addressing this problem. So it is great to

21 see them there.

22 **Q.** Thank you. If we can go back to your statement please,

23 at page 36 CAB000003_0036, paragraph 116. I just want

24 to look at two paragraphs. 116 is the first:

25 "... the Cabinet Office does not recognise either

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1 sectors. So we do need some sort of a definition

2 I think, at the top, but it needs to be adaptable in

3 policing, in education, in health settings. So that's

4 really my point, is that that one single definition

5 probably won't work in all of those different sectors.

6 So it is very much a case of finding something elegant

7 and simple at the top and then applying it to particular

8 areas where it will be most used by operational

9 partners.

10 **Q.** Thank you. But the need to have something elegant and

11 simple at the top, you would recognise, because the

12 gentle challenge I just want to introduce in relation to

13 this, is the Inquiry has heard a lot of evidence about

14 the importance of a single definition, clarity, data,

15 monitoring interventions. If you don't have a clear

16 definition, how do you assure the success or otherwise

17 of interventions? You would agree with all of that,

18 would you? But you would see a top-line definition but

19 with, then, flexibility for individual agencies as to

20 how they then work on that?

21 **A.** Yes, and one of our further recommendations to the Home

22 Office, which I understand that they are considering, is

23 that once this interim guidance is finalised, there will

24 be sector-specific guidance that can be issued that will

25 then support that top-line definition. I think one of

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1 'VFI' or 'NIEV' as presently describing a group with

2 fixed boundaries determined by a single exhaustive set

3 of criteria. The work undertaken has instead

4 highlighted the importance of the interaction between

5 a range of risk factors and behaviours. The

6 significance of those indicators, and the point at which

7 intervention may be appropriate, may also differ

8 materially between sectors."

9 Then, before I ask you anything about that, could we

10 also look at page 37 CAB000003_0037, paragraph 120. You

11 say, third line:

12 "The difficulties are such that it is not clear, at

13 least to me, that there should be a single, standard

14 definition of a VFI which is capable of widespread,

15 consistent operational use across government and by

16 frontline partners. This does not mean that this work

17 should not continue, but that we should recognise the

18 limitations and emphasise the importance of flexibility

19 across sectors."

20 What have you got in mind there, when saying that

21 there may not ultimately be a single standard definition

22 of a VFI, which is capable of widespread, consistent

23 operational use?

24 **A.** I think the importance of that is that -- the phrase

25 there emphasises the importance of flexibility across

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1 your expert witnesses talked about the importance of

2 public currency in a definition. So "VFIs" may not be

3 the best single definition and we can take issue, as

4 I know some of your witnesses have, on "fixated" versus

5 "fascinated". But the virtue of VFIs is that it is

6 reasonably well understood now and it maybe that's the

7 top-level definition that then needs to be adapted for

8 the sector.

9 **Q.** Thank you. Within your statement, could we look,

10 please, at page 43 CAB000003_0043, the section here on

11 collaboration, coordination, and communication in

12 Government. Now, you give quite a lot of detail about

13 this. But what I want to understand is, given some of

14 the complexities that we have been looking at,

15 particularly in the variation at local authority level

16 in the current provision, what should be the ongoing

17 role of the Cabinet Office in resolutions, or have

18 matters now gone back to business as usual with the Home

19 Office, with its taskforce being in the lead?

20 **A.** So I don't think I would ever want to describe this as

21 being back to business as usual, but the Home Office

22 has, as Mr Emmett has set out, put in place structures

23 at very senior level and at working level, with a whole

24 range of data and information inputs into those, as well

25 as expertise coming from local level and from other

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1 Government departments. So, I'm confident that within
2 those structures, the Home Office will be able to take
3 this forward.

4 **MR MOSS:** Thank you. Sir, I'm about to move to a different
5 subtopic and I note the time. I'm making good progress
6 in exploring issues with Dr Abbott but we will need to
7 go into the afternoon session. I wonder if I might
8 suggest a shorter lunch, perhaps to 1.40 pm, if that's
9 possible?

10 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Certainly. Thank you all very much.
11 I will sit again at 1.40 pm.

12 **MR MOSS:** Thank you, sir.

13 (12.58 pm)

14 (The short adjournment)

15 (1.41 pm)

16 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Yes, Mr Moss.

17 **MR MOSS:** Thank you, sir. So Dr Abbott, five final
18 subtopics please, all looking at the position reached
19 and options for the future. Could we take the first one
20 as being what the future pathway for VFIs might be and
21 if we can take that by reference to page 45
22 CAB000003_0045 of your statement.

23 You see you have got "Existing multi-agency
24 structures" and I'm interested in exploring which of the
25 multi-agency structures may be the most fruitful to take

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1 structures tend to be the ones that local respondents
2 feel they can work within the best.
3 However, as we have discussed today, the way that
4 those MASH structures work in different places across
5 the country differs. So it may work quite well in
6 Birmingham and Manchester, it may not work so well
7 elsewhere. So I think the MASH is probably the one that
8 people refer to the most as working the best and
9 probably the most suited to this sort of thing but it
10 is, again, patchy and that is the overwhelming
11 conclusion that we have seen on a number of issues
12 today. Which is why I think the Cabinet Office view, as
13 we have set out in the NSC paper and since then, is the
14 importance of working on this Big Front Door proposal
15 and not just on the front door but on the wiring that
16 sits behind the front door, to make sure that MASHs and
17 MAPPAs and other --

18 **Q.** I'm going to come back to the Big Front Door but
19 specifically, ultimately, if, at the moment, there is
20 a complex patchwork that works differently locally,
21 unless one is going to accept that status quo, whether
22 or not you have a front door triage system, there needs
23 to be a pathway other than Prevent to case manage these
24 cases to assess them, to try to mitigate risk. And
25 before one gets to the issue about a different triaging

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1 forward for a distinct future pathway.

2 What you say about that is that those structures:
3 "... sit within the policy and operational
4 responsibilities of other departments and agencies ..."

5 A point which you have developed this morning:
6 "The Cabinet Office has neither operational
7 responsibility for those structures nor detailed
8 visibility of their operation ..."

9 You say, in paragraph 148:

10 "The broader policy work being undertaken by the
11 Home Office in relation to VFI/NIEV included a review
12 undertaken by the Home Office VFI Unit in May 2025 to
13 assess the effectiveness of the Home Office and
14 police-led services and interventions, which highlighted
15 the complex and crowded multi-agency landscape."

16 Now, of course that was also evident from the
17 Cabinet Office work. Understanding all of that, does
18 the Cabinet Office have a view now as to what may be the
19 most effective or the best candidate existing
20 multi-agency structure to take forward or whether a new
21 multi-agency structure may be required?

22 **A.** So I think one of the things that we have heard from
23 respondents to our workshops in Birmingham and
24 Manchester was that, if you had to pick one existing
25 structure, the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs, the MASH,

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1 system, do we understand that, with all the caveats that
2 you are giving, that, at least from the engagement in
3 Birmingham and Manchester, having MASH as actually
4 a case management holding body, which for some might be
5 an expansion, tentatively seems perhaps the most
6 promising, or at least what people were telling you is
7 the most promising?

8 **A.** It seems that way, yes, with the caveats that we have
9 already set out included in my statement.

10 **Q.** Thank you. Then at page 47 CAB000003_0047, please,
11 taking it as briefly as I may. In terms of gaps in
12 strategy, paragraph 155, you say the cohort needs to be
13 identified and defined better, effectively. Frontline
14 professionals need guidance, if you look at 159.

15 Then, over the page CAB000003_0048, good local
16 practice paragraph 160 should be considered for national
17 application. But also, at 161, large systemic change
18 should also be considered.

19 Does the Cabinet Office have a position or view now
20 on, at a granular level, the best way to achieve those?

21 **A.** I think the right way to achieve these now is through
22 the NIEV framework that the Home Office has set out.
23 The Cabinet Office, however, will not step back from
24 this work and will continue to be very closely involved
25 through those structures with the Home Office.

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1 Q. Thank you. The second aspect I want to look at is just
2 the future role of Prevent. I'm going to try to do this
3 without reference to complex documents and so on and
4 summarise it in this way. At present, because of the
5 statutory boundaries, by definition, Prevent and Channel
6 deals with those who are vulnerable to being drawn into
7 terrorism. Otherwise, it would be acting outside the
8 current statutory bounds. But Prevent is open, it might
9 be thought, to a subset of the VFI cohort where they
10 fall within certain categories, so FEVMCA, the
11 Fascination with Extreme Violence and Mass Casualty
12 Attacks, is the most obvious one but there are others.

13 If they come within those areas, and they are
14 assessed to be vulnerable to be drawn into terrorism,
15 then they can be supported through Prevent. So that's
16 a very high-level summary.

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. In, again, very broad terms, we have been exploring two
19 views -- and I am sure there is a spectrum in between
20 them -- but, on the one hand, it may be said that's
21 actually perfectly appropriate, leaving aside the
22 statutory definitions, because Prevent is looking at
23 upstream identification -- you know what I mean by
24 that -- for which you don't need an ideology and while
25 there may be a bit of stretch involved, ultimately, what

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1 have set out, the slight -- "fudge" is not quite the
2 right word but you know what I mean -- slight
3 compromises in definitions and the way people work. We
4 are, all of us I think, engaged in learning whilst doing
5 in this area and so there may well be -- some of those
6 compromises may well be necessary at this stage but we
7 do need to try and design a system that is a little bit
8 more consistent as we go forwards.

9 Q. Thank you. What about a more fundamental challenge that
10 would suggest that, actually, with recent changes in the
11 nature of the threat, so more being seen online, more
12 what's sometimes called "hybridised threat", which you
13 will be far more expert than me on, that the whole basis
14 of distinction between terrorism and ideological-driven
15 extreme action and non-ideological attacks, is somewhat
16 outdated, and there needs to be more fundamental reform?

17 A. I think certainly the nature of the threat has changed,
18 as you set out. What classifies as terrorism is very
19 clearly set out in law and I do not think there's
20 necessarily a case right now for changing that. What we
21 do need to do is make sure we are getting after the
22 sub-terrorism levels much more effectively than we have
23 done to date.

24 Q. Thank you. Thirdly -- and I said I would come back to
25 it -- the Big Front Door, so if we could look at page 52

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1 you are looking at is those who perhaps don't have
2 a clear ideology or they are interested in violence for
3 violence's sake but because of their propensities, are
4 vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism. So it is
5 a suitable way to identify a sub-cohort.

6 The alternative view would be that that way of
7 dealing with things, recognising that it arises from
8 a statutory test, remains an awkward compromise, that
9 one is looking at those who don't present with ideology
10 and applying a test of whether they are vulnerable to
11 being drawn into terrorism, which implies ideology, and
12 that aspects such as the CTPHQ guidance saying
13 "fascination with committing" is all, in a way, slightly
14 compromised style to identify the more serious end of
15 the risk, but it risks leading to inconsistent
16 decision-making and, therefore, is not really
17 an appropriate final settlement.

18 Does the Cabinet Office have a view on those two
19 schools of thought?

20 A. I think the Cabinet Office view, such as it exists and
21 as I have set out already, it is properly for the Home
22 Office and others to consider the final settled view.
23 Prevent is very clearly a part of the solution but not
24 the whole solution and I think the landscape is
25 characterised in some ways by the compromises that you

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1 CAB000003_0052 and paragraph 178. So, we are talking
2 here about an initial screening stage which may or may
3 not also have ongoing case management responsibilities.
4 But you say:

5 "One of the approaches considered through the
6 cross-government work was the concept of a 'big front
7 door', a mechanism through which referrals could
8 initially be received and assessed before being directed
9 to the part of the system best placed to respond."

10 Then if we go over the page, please, CAB000003_0053
11 to paragraphs 183 and 184. You have introduced other
12 issues in the interim but you come back to conclude as
13 follows:

14 "These are all matters which the Inquiry will be
15 considering in the course of Phase 2. On its own, the
16 Cabinet Office is unable to resolve these questions at
17 the level of detail required to recommend definitively
18 one model over another."

19 Then you say:

20 "... one of the reasons for commissioning further
21 work from the relevant departments was precisely that
22 the Cabinet Office did not possess the sector-specific
23 expertise necessary to determine, for example, how
24 clinical, safeguarding or criminal-justice thresholds
25 should be altered."

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1 Then you go on to say, I did not want to overlook
2 it, 184:
3 "The Cabinet Office's work is best understood as
4 identifying that policy problem and possible models for
5 addressing it, rather than determine doing the detailed
6 operational design. That design requires more detailed
7 work by the Home Office and the departments and agencies
8 responsible for the relevant services, which
9 I understand is continuing ..."

10 Now, going back to the language of 183, it might be
11 thought to be one thing to acknowledge that the Cabinet
12 Office is unable to resolve those questions. But does
13 the Cabinet Office not have a view on the desirability
14 and the practicability of the Big Front Door, given all
15 the work that it did?

16 A. Yes, I think what we have tried to set out, both in this
17 statement and in other papers, is that some sort of Big
18 Front Door, some sort of triaging mechanism is probably
19 necessary, given the vast multiplicity of different
20 cases that have been brought into the system. I think
21 what we are saying here is we would not be qualified to
22 actually set out what the design of that might look like
23 in detail. That would be for others to set out.
24 Clearly, you have also had a range of different opinions
25 from the local level as to whether that is indeed

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1 Chair's note, at page 55 CAB000003_0055. There is
2 a section in your statement that runs from paragraph 194
3 through to 203 and I'm not going to go through all
4 aspects of that, but one of the matters that the learned
5 Chair picked up with Mr Emmett was that he said, in
6 terms of options:

7 "So our colleagues from the Cabinet Office and part
8 of the work of the taskforce are taking forward a piece
9 of work, looking in broad policy terms at options around
10 the challenge of data sharing. That's yet to be
11 completed. It is referenced in my colleague,
12 Mr Abbott's, witness statement."

13 Doing the best we can, if we look at page 57
14 CAB000003_0057 of your statement, paragraph 200, you say
15 there:

16 "One of these workstreams concerned Information
17 Management and Access. The Cabinet Office agreed to
18 support the transition by undertaking a short-term
19 project to make initial progress on that workstream,
20 with the intention that the resulting analysis and
21 recommendations would be handed to the Home Office for
22 further policy development."

23 Then 201, referring, I think, to the same thing:

24 "The project was also designed to develop a better
25 understanding of the barriers that may arise in

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1 something that they would want. So that has to be all
2 fed into the work the Home Office is leading and in
3 determining the way to go forwards.

4 Q. As the Inquiry is experiencing, one difficulty is,
5 catchy phrase though it is, "Big Front Door" can
6 actually mean different things. One view of it is that
7 it could capture public risk type cases, so would be the
8 triage source for VFI type cases and ideological
9 terrorism type cases, and would then refer on to some
10 sort of VFI type pathway and onto Prevent for
11 ideological cases.

12 Another view of the Big Front Door, so a wider front
13 door, is that it should be the body that takes all
14 public protection and safeguarding cases. Did the
15 Cabinet Office get as far in its thinking in its work as
16 a view, even a provisional view, as to which of those
17 was preferable?

18 A. No, we did not reach a sort of settled view but I think,
19 if I recall correctly, the NSC paper did raise the
20 possibility that a Big Front Door could be used much
21 more widely for people of all sorts of vulnerabilities
22 that presented. But that would, of course, be a much
23 more significant project.

24 Q. Fourthly, I just want to ask you about data information
25 sharing. So, if we just look, partly for the learned

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1 practice ..."

2 Then over the page, CAB000003_0058, 202:

3 "The focus has therefore developed towards
4 identifying practical and tangible measures which could
5 improve the operation of the existing arrangements."

6 Could you just clarify for us what this Cabinet
7 Office piece of work is, first of all, and, secondly,
8 when it is expected to deliver?

9 A. Yes. So, as we completed the policy sprint in the first
10 quarter of this year, we were then handing over to the
11 Home Office-led NIEV structures. One of those work
12 streams that the NIEV structures identified was
13 precisely data sharing and information sharing. We
14 agreed that, in addition to having done the policy
15 sprint, the Cabinet Office would support the Home Office
16 in doing a little bit of additional work in this
17 particular area. I can give you some emerging
18 conclusions of that work, if that would be helpful.

19 Q. Please.

20 A. I think, in common with some of the other evidence you
21 have heard in the Inquiry, the problem with data and
22 information sharing is generally not that legal pathways
23 don't exist, in fact, there seem to be an abundance of
24 legal pathways to facilitate information sharing and
25 indeed, there is an abundance of guidance as well, some

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issued by the Information Commissioners' Office, others issued by the Attorney General's Office. There is a lot of guidance and a lot of legal pathways. The work that we have started to do to support the Home Office is identified blockers that fall into three different buckets: one, operational capability. So these are sort of practical obstacles to data sharing. So principally, the interoperability of case management systems. You will be familiar with that issue.

The second bucket is capacity. So the capacity of practitioners themselves, either to upskill themselves on the legal frameworks and channels that are available to them and lack of capacity to draft and develop the appropriate documentation and agreements that are required under those legal frameworks.

Then the third bucket is cultural and those are the sort of ingrained risk aversion that we have seen manifest themselves, with people just being nervous and overly cautious about sharing information. So we have identified three distinction buckets that are separate from legal obstacles to data and information sharing.

The work to propose solutions is less developed but I can answer your question in that the paper will be finished, we hope, in the first half of next month, so in the next three or four weeks and that will be

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local authority witnesses tomorrow, changes in children's services in particular, and statutory changes which have, no doubt helpfully, sought to emphasise the ability to share information and indeed a duty to do so where it is appropriate for the welfare of the child. I paraphrase.

But, it might be thought that while that is important in children's services work, it hasn't completely married up with the VFI workstreams and so it may be thought not to carry sufficient emphasis on information sharing where the child is a risk to others and we will explore tomorrow where it does touch on that.

Is there force in that criticism?

A. I'm not familiar with the details of the safeguarding measures that have come into place. I do know that they are quite positive in their overall outlook and do force that joining up, but they should absolutely take account of the VFI risk.

Q. Is one of the options being considered whether the matter should be put beyond doubt by legislation? Of course, you can make the point: well, it can get overly complex, but in this area of sharing information where there is a risk of a child, or for that matter, a young adult, harming others, a general permission to share

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presented to the Home Office is a full set of solutions. But I think, just sort of in general terms, there needs to be better use of technology. So more interoperable systems. We think better, more creative use of AI, to help develop information sharing agreements at pace. Better sharing of best practice. We think information sharing and expertise should be embedded at local level. So agencies and operational partners have somebody to turn to, to say: actually, help me write this agreement. Then support ongoing pilots. So I think we have had evidence, it talks about the Thames Valley Police's "together programme". I think that was in one of the exhibits.

My understanding is the Department for Education is leading a multi-agency information sharing pilot and I think Lancashire Violence Reduction Unit is also doing an information sharing pilot. So we need to make sure that those examples of best practice are also shared more widely.

So I think, in a nutshell, that is the problem and some of the ways to get to a solution on information sharing.

Q. One of the potential criticisms in this area maybe Government not being joined up and the reason why I raise that with you is that we will explore, with

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information in that sphere, is it thought that that might help to put the matter beyond doubt?

A. My understanding is, where there is an urgency or this is a public protection risk, then the permission is not necessary. So that the information should be shared immediately if there is a public protection problem. But certainly, if there is a requirement for legislation to put that beyond doubt, as you say, we should look carefully at it.

Q. Is it being looked carefully at, as part of the work the Cabinet Office is doing?

A. It is not part of the work that we are doing now but we will make sure we include it in the paper.

Q. Thank you. Then, finally, on the role of the internet and social media. If we could have page 62 CAB000003_0062. Paragraph 222 towards the bottom of the page. Forgive me, it may be the following, thank you CAB000003_0063. So:

"Some of the salient workstreams on online harms ..."

You are summarising here work that was done, and at point (c), you refer to a:

"... September 2025, DCMS produced [paper] Online Safety & Technology-Enabled Harm ..."

Then, over the page, please, CAB000003_0064 at

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1 paragraph 223 you say that the:
 2 "... NSS produced a briefing [paper] for the Prime
 3 Minister, Online Harms: Expanding our Current
 4 Approach ..."
 5 I think that was the reference -- we saw it earlier,
 6 didn't we? You have received separate advice on online
 7 harms --
 8 **A.** Yes.
 9 **Q.** -- and I think that's what's being referred to.
 10 Without, perhaps, turning up the detailed exhibit, we
 11 know that the Government is taking forward a number of
 12 positive actions in this general area. So we know,
 13 because it has been announced in the King's speech, that
 14 there will be a criminal offence for extreme violent
 15 content online and we know, and it is touched on in your
 16 statement, that there will be the under 16s social media
 17 ban and we have heard from Mr Emmett about Home Office
 18 working to try to make sure that that is effective and
 19 broad enough, and we have touched already on the
 20 device-level controls over nudity. Taking those as
 21 read, you say in your statement that the Cabinet
 22 Office -- it is the same paragraphs, 223-224:
 23 "... the Cabinet Office considers there to be
 24 currently an insufficient evidence base for any
 25 comprehensive conclusions about the correlation between
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1 existing laws and to take down content -- sorry, refer
 2 and take down content that is already in breach of
 3 platforms' terms of service.
 4 These are areas where there is more work to be done.
 5 The sheer volume of material online makes it difficult,
 6 as you have already pointed out, sir, the difficulty of
 7 enforcing current legislation. Those are areas for more
 8 work.
 9 **Q.** So on that first aspect, the "lawful but awful", one of
 10 the things in relation to that material specifically to
 11 mitigate the risk to children further, would be to move
 12 that up in the pecking order under the OSA. So to move
 13 it -- it is already covered -- but to move it up to
 14 "primary priority content". Does the Cabinet Office
 15 support that being done?
 16 **A.** I think that's properly a view for DCMS, the lead
 17 department in that case.
 18 **Q.** You say existing -- strengthening existing laws, so the
 19 referral and removal of content on the basis of
 20 platforms' terms of service and their community
 21 standards. What about the take-down powers?
 22 **A.** So I think that is one of the areas that the Government
 23 is intending to legislate on. We also need -- and this
 24 has been flagged in previous Cabinet Office's work -- to
 25 look at expanding the resource available in policing for
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1 VFI and the online landscape."
 2 And you say "further work is needed", but it does
 3 also seem that the Cabinet Office accepts that further
 4 work is needed in the online harms environment; yes?
 5 **A.** Yes.
 6 **Q.** So can you tell us, in concrete terms, what further
 7 measures that are not yet in train and not yet
 8 announced, the Cabinet Office supports in relation to
 9 online harms that are relevant to VFIs?
 10 **A.** Yes, of course. So this is very much an emerging area
 11 of work, as you set out. I think there are sort of two
 12 areas, I would say, of broad interest to the Cabinet
 13 Office for further work by the lead Government
 14 departments. The biggest challenge is the so-called
 15 "lawful but awful" content. You have referred to some
 16 of the gore communities earlier in this Inquiry.
 17 I think that is an area where this country and other
 18 countries around the world are grappling with trying to
 19 understand how to deal with that particular issue.
 20 I think there is also an issue --
 21 **Q.** If you are moving on from that, can I ask you one
 22 aspect --
 23 **A.** No --
 24 **Q.** Forgive me, do carry on.
 25 **A.** A second point, which is about going further to enforce
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1 example, to actually go after those things that are
 2 flagged and referred and to take action on those.
 3 **Q.** Thank you. I have raised, with previous witnesses, the
 4 fact that when one looks at the device-level nudity
 5 controls that are proposed, they built on what some of
 6 the main providers -- Apple amongst them -- had
 7 introduced as part of their community safeguard. So
 8 they were voluntary measures on the operating systems
 9 and the devices, that, effectively, allowed parents to
 10 monitor a child's account and to get an alert if they
 11 were seeking to deal with certain content and content
 12 would be pixelated before then and an inability to take
 13 nude pictures from a phone if it is set up as a child
 14 account.
 15 In open source materials, certainly Apple -- and it
 16 may be the case with others as well -- also allows
 17 control of extreme violence and gore in the same way
 18 through opt-in operating system and device controls.
 19 Does the Cabinet Office have a view as to whether
 20 similar device and operating-system-level controls
 21 should be introduced to mitigate the risks of extreme
 22 violence and gore for children?
 23 **A.** Clearly, the opt-in arrangements that you have described
 24 are not always as thorough as we would like or as
 25 comprehensive as we would like and I think we all need
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1 to consider very carefully the question of whether we
2 need device-level interventions for a range of other
3 harms. I think the fact that the Government is
4 legislating for device-level interventions on nudity,
5 does signal the direction of travel and we will have to
6 look at that in more detail, but it is probably
7 a question for the DCMS.

8 **Q.** But while one notes what you say about there may be
9 questions about how thorough it is, the general
10 experience may be that for trying to control and
11 mitigate risk at the other end of what goes on the
12 internet in the first place -- it is summed up in the
13 phrase "whack-a-mole" -- I mean, you should and can take
14 steps to limit that, but it is, to some extent, holding
15 back the tide. Does not device-level controls, as some
16 others have said, offer real promise for something
17 that's more effective, even if not 100 per cent
18 effective?

19 **A.** It does.

20 **Q.** Is that being treated with sufficient urgency?

21 **A.** It is, but it is properly a question for the lead
22 Government department, in this case, DCMS.

23 **MR MOSS:** Dr Abbott, thank you. Those are my questions.
24 Sir, as you know permission has been granted to, I think
25 it is Mr Illingworth on this occasion, as the single

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1 settlement."

2 So that suggests that the ambition has been watered
3 down, at least with respect to the Home Office; is that
4 fair?

5 **A.** So my answer to the question from the Counsel to the
6 Inquiry was about the NSS level of ambition, and the NSS
7 level of ambition has not been watered down and we
8 continue to work very closely with the Home Office.
9 I think Mr Emmett referred to our position as a rather
10 demanding one and I'm glad that that was his impression
11 of our position because I think the evidence that we
12 have sought to give to this Inquiry has set out the
13 Cabinet Office's quite unique role in this; it's rather
14 different to other roles.

15 I think, in terms of the Home Office's position, the
16 Inquiry has already heard from Mr Emmett about the
17 funding constraints that were put on the Home Office at
18 that time around the SR negotiations, and that they
19 were, in that situation, required to look at low-cost,
20 cost-neutral measures at that time.

21 **Q.** Thank you. You have already been taken to what the Home
22 Office said as their input into this meeting and you
23 have touched on it there in relation to limited
24 resources, operational pressures, difficulty delivering
25 change with effectively no uplifting resources. You

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1 advocate of the three victims teams, he has been granted
2 permission to ask questions.

3 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Thank you very much, Mr Moss. Yes,
4 Mr Illingworth.

Questions by MR ILLINGWORTH

6 **MR ILLINGWORTH:** Thank you, sir.

7 Good afternoon, Dr Abbott. I ask questions on
8 behalf of the three victim groups, as has already been
9 said.

10 In answer to a question from Mr Moss earlier, you
11 said it wouldn't be fair to say the ambition to deliver
12 the NSC's list of actions had been watered down, at
13 least with respect to the NSS. But that specific phrase
14 does appear in some advice that has been prepared by NSS
15 colleagues. I would just like to take you to that, if
16 I may.

17 Could we go back to the document, CAB000006, please,
18 on the second page CAB000006_0002. Thank you very much.
19 Looking at that first paragraph that's headed "steer".
20 This is a steer for the Cabinet Secretary, I believe,
21 ahead of the meaning he was going to chair. Four lines
22 down:

23 "As you will see from the papers, the Home Office in
24 particular is seeking to 'reframe' (read: water down)
25 the longer-term solutions on the back of their SR

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1 also said earlier that the decision to put the VFI
2 taskforce into the Home Office, rather than keeping it
3 within the Cabinet Office, was motivated in part by the
4 Home Office having greater resources than the Cabinet
5 Office.

6 Now, that might be true in terms of head count but
7 don't these documents suggest the Home Office has
8 actually scaled back the ambition of its proposals
9 precisely because it lacks the necessary resources?

10 **A.** I think this is a question of relativity. The Home
11 Office, compared to my team, has vastly different scale
12 of resources not just in terms of head count but in
13 terms of budget, in terms of expertise. It is just not
14 even comparable.

15 **Q.** You said several times in your answers this morning that
16 resource allocation is a matter as between individual
17 departments and the Treasury by negotiation; of course,
18 that's true. But it is not simply a case of the
19 Treasury saying: here is a figure, over to you. It is
20 a question of bidding, isn't it? So doesn't -- the fact
21 that additional resources haven't been made available
22 for this work, doesn't that suggest that it hasn't been
23 sufficiently prioritised as against other competing
24 priorities?

25 **A.** I think the Home Office would tell you they have a large

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1 range of risks that they are trying to manage, some of
 2 which where the risk is rising very, very quickly
 3 indeed, but this is properly a question for the Home
 4 Office, in terms of their prioritisation of their
 5 internal resources.

6 **Q.** The NSS has a coordinating role in relation to national
 7 security across Government. Presumably the Cabinet
 8 Office also has an interest in the outcome of SR, which
 9 involves prioritisation decisions across Government. So
 10 does the Cabinet Office not have a view as to whether
 11 the right balance has been struck in terms of those
 12 competing priorities? It is fundamental, isn't it?

13 **A.** It is fundamental. I would wish, personal view, that
 14 there had been more resource given to this at that time.
 15 I don't think that precludes resource being allocated to
 16 this effort in the future and I would be fairly
 17 confident that that indeed will be the case. Although,
 18 I cannot pre-judge any discussion that the Home Office
 19 would be having with the Treasury.

20 **Q.** Yes. But the NSC said, in March 2025, there needed to
 21 be a step-change in this area?

22 **A.** It did.

23 **Q.** Has that happened?

24 **A.** I think we have, as a system, worked hard on this issue.
 25 Do I wish it could have gone faster and further? Yes,

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1 doesn't have written records of it. Has the Cabinet
 2 Office asked the Home Office and the Department for
 3 Education to confirm whether any such exercise took
 4 place?

5 **A.** We have looked as hard as we possibly can for that
 6 document. I regret that we are not able to give a clear
 7 answer to this Inquiry. I would also say, however
 8 though, that the lack of that document, I don't think
 9 has harmed in any way the process of the work that has
 10 happened since then and indeed, quite a lot of mapping
 11 of the landscape, I think, has already happened over the
 12 course of the work. We just don't have that particular
 13 document and we can't track down in writing, as you
 14 said, the nature of that particular request. But we
 15 will keep looking and if we do find it, we will, of
 16 course, furnish it to the Inquiry.

17 **Q.** Yes, so it is clear from the statement it has not been
 18 found in the Cabinet Office but have you gone to the
 19 Home Office and the DfE to say: we think we may have
 20 asked you to do this exercise, do you recall us asking,
 21 have you done anything?

22 Has that request been put in to those two
 23 departments?

24 **A.** I would imagine that we have made that request but
 25 I will confirm later to the Inquiry.

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1 I do. But I think we are in a markedly different
 2 position today than we were in July 2024. As I have
 3 already set out, systems like Channel took six, seven,
 4 eight years to get off the ground. So I think a degree
 5 of recognition of how complex this is, is important.
 6 But do I wish we had gone further and faster? Yes.

7 **Q.** Thank you. My other brief topic, please, is on the
 8 exercise that was tasked in terms of mapping the
 9 multi-agency landscape and how different departments
 10 work together.

11 We understand from your statement -- I think it is
 12 paragraph 145 -- that the Cabinet Office had asked the
 13 Home Office and Department for Education in early 2025
 14 to map the existing landscape of the relevant police and
 15 local authority-led, multi-agency structures and the
 16 interventions available to them, effectively working out
 17 what the current multi-agency landscape looks like. But
 18 you say that the Cabinet Office hasn't been able to
 19 locate any written material relating to that ask; it may
 20 have been made verbally. Now, in his evidence during --
 21 in his comments during the second seminar, Lord Anderson
 22 told the Inquiry that he would have loved to see that
 23 document, if it was ever produced, but he hadn't
 24 succeeded in getting hold of it.

25 Obviously it is clear that the Cabinet Office

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1 **MR ILLINGWORTH:** Thank you very much. I have no further
 2 questions.

3 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Thank you very much, Mr Illingworth.

4 Dr Abbott, I have no questions myself. You have put
 5 a considerable amount of effort into your statement.
 6 I'm very grateful for your attendance today. So, thank
 7 you very much indeed. You are free to go.

8 **A.** Thank you.

9 **MR MOSS:** Thank you, Dr Abbott. Sir, Mr Timothy Jacques is
 10 our next witness.

11 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Yes. Mr Jacques, come forward.

12 If you could remain standing for a moment,
 13 Mr Jacques.

14 **MR TIMOTHY JACQUES (sworn)**

15 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Thank you very much. Please have
 16 a seat. I'm sorry we have kept you waiting. Mr Boyle.

17 **Questions by MR BOYLE**

18 **MR BOYLE:** Thank you. Mr Jacques, could you give your full
 19 name, please?

20 **A.** Timothy Peter Jacques.

21 **Q.** Thank you. You are the current Independent Prevent
 22 Commissioner, is that right?

23 **A.** That is correct.

24 **Q.** Thank you. Could we have on screen your statement,
 25 please. It is IPC000001. We have the first page there.

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1 We see it is dated 7 August, 2026. Could we have
2 page 26 IPC000001_0026, please.

3 Your signature is there but of course redacted. But
4 can you confirm, now please, that the contents of that
5 statement are true to the best of your knowledge and
6 belief?

7 **A.** I can, yes.

8 **Q.** Thank you. Mr Jacques, I will just set out the
9 structure I'm going to go through in my questioning and
10 then we will move into your experience and background.

11 So that's the first topic. Then the definition of
12 VFIs, the Prevent definition and any gap between that
13 and what a VFI is. And then potential changes, so
14 widening the definition of terrorism; the definition of
15 Prevent; a new VFI pathway; the concept of a Big Front
16 Door; and then we will move onto online activity and
17 interventions and effectiveness of current laws and
18 systems.

19 So starting, please, with your experience and
20 background. The Prevent -- the role of the Prevent
21 Commissioner was established in December 2024; is that
22 right?

23 **A.** It is, yes.

24 **Q.** And the Interim Prevent Commissioner was
25 Lord Anderson KC, who spoke in one of our seminars, is
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1 known as the StaCU, Standards and Complaints Unit.
2 Whilst that function has changed, and changed under
3 Lord Anderson's commissionership, we are and do receive
4 and indeed encourage complaints about Prevent, its
5 effectiveness, its impact, adverse consequences,
6 et cetera, in order to hold the agencies and the system
7 itself to account.

8 **Q.** Can those complaints come from both the public and
9 practitioners?

10 **A.** So there is a public portal on our website, the office
11 of the Independent Prevent Commissioner and we engage
12 with civil society organisations, members of the public
13 more generally, to understand the lived experience of
14 Prevent, the concerns about Prevent. That is very much
15 part of the role.

16 **Q.** Has that part of the role given you direct knowledge, it
17 may be on an anecdotal basis though, of the sort of
18 issues that you see arising on Prevent casework?

19 **A.** Yes, I'm relatively early into my term, six months or so
20 now, and those concerns are generally well known,
21 I think well shared. But, you know, it certainly is my
22 intention and it is my office's intention to seek out
23 and understand those roles and then engage with the
24 relevant authorities, to understand and make
25 improvements where improvements can be made.
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1 that right?

2 **A.** That is correct, yes.

3 **Q.** And you were appointed to succeed him in April 2026?

4 **A.** That is correct.

5 **Q.** Thank you. The Prevent Commissioner is a public
6 appointee of the Home Office but operates independently
7 from Government and you have an office; is that right?

8 **A.** That is correct.

9 **Q.** That supports you with a team of civil servants. Are
10 you able to just briefly explain the role in terms of
11 the different tasks that you undertake?

12 **A.** Yes. Fundamentally, it is about oversight and scrutiny
13 of the Prevent system, its effectiveness: is it
14 operating as it says it should and is that description
15 of how it should operate fit for today's current threat
16 environment?

17 So it is oversight and scrutiny and ultimately,
18 engaging widely to strengthen that oversight and
19 scrutiny, and as you say, politically independent of the
20 agencies that deliver on Prevent.

21 **Q.** In terms of the way that might be done in practice, is
22 this right, does your office receive feedback, concerns
23 and complaints about Prevent?

24 **A.** Yes, there was a previous function, under the Commission
25 for Countering Extremism that was referenced that was
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1 **Q.** How do you, in your role, review how effectively Prevent
2 is performing?

3 **A.** It is a combination of methods. We speak to
4 practitioners, we examine practice, we attend the
5 training, we speak to those that have been subjected to
6 Prevent. And we want to understand, through Home Office
7 colleagues particularly, where is the evidence around
8 the effectiveness of Prevent, the interventions provided
9 within the Channel programme. So it is encouraging that
10 evidence-built, effective system to counter people being
11 drawn into terrorism.

12 **Q.** Thank you. Both phases of this Inquiry have heard much
13 about Lord Anderson KC's review "Lessons for Prevent".
14 That was carried out as part of his role as Interim
15 Prevent Commissioner, is that right?

16 **A.** It is, yes.

17 **Q.** So part of your role is that you can carry out
18 investigations into specific issues, is that right?

19 **A.** Yes, that is correct.

20 **Q.** Thank you. You tell us, at your paragraph 89, that the
21 Prevent Commissioner is not currently founded on
22 a statutory basis and that's something that would make
23 it more effective, not just in relation to counter
24 terrorism but also the other Government departments and
25 local authorities with statutory responsibility for
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1 delivery of Prevent, is that right?
 2 **A.** That is correct. There is a number of similar roles,
 3 the Children's Commissioner is one, that has statutory
 4 powers. It is my view and it was certainly
 5 Lord Anderson's view as well that, because of the range
 6 of organisations and the range of authorities under this
 7 Prevent duty, that having powers for the Commissioner to
 8 be able to understand fully and receive documents and
 9 input from those agencies, is critical to the
 10 commissioner's role.

11 Now, lots of -- certainly, statutory authorities are
 12 very keen to share their situations, their policies
 13 et cetera, but of course, under critical spotlight, some
 14 may not be inclined to do so. So I think it is
 15 important.

16 **Q.** As you say, you have been in your role for six months
 17 but have you experienced any challenges that this might
 18 relate to insofar as they relate to VFIs?

19 **A.** No. I think people -- and through obviously this
 20 Inquiry and understanding of this Inquiry, people are
 21 exercised by the issues and the understanding of that
 22 and we have not encountered any problems in people
 23 sharing their understanding and experiences with us.

24 **Q.** Thank you. I just want to ask you a bit about your
 25 career history and one or two points of relevance, from

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1 involved in the criminal justice system, reducing
 2 re-offending, sharing the problems, looking at
 3 understanding, looking at working together and how we
 4 can make best use of our collective resources.

5 **Q.** Thank you. Your other current role is as Chief
 6 Executive Officer of the Vault Youth Zone in Preston
 7 which is a youth work charity, is that right?

8 **A.** That is correct, yes.

9 **Q.** I think you say that through that role, you voluntary
 10 chaired or co-chaired a city-wide, multi-agency
 11 safeguarding panel, which I think was re-constituted to
 12 become a Young Futures Partnership Prevention Panel,
 13 have I got that right?

14 **A.** You have, yes.

15 **Q.** I think we have heard about those panels in evidence
 16 from others, but from your perspective in your panel,
 17 could you just, again, give a brief précis of the work
 18 that you do?

19 **A.** I can, yes. So, it is a very early-stage identification
 20 and potential for intervention for young people who are
 21 seen to be at risk of being criminally exploited. It
 22 was originally set up aimed at education authorities,
 23 referrals in from schools, and it is attended by all the
 24 statutory agencies that you would imagine, so police,
 25 social care, early help services, voluntary third

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1 the Inquiry's perspective.

2 You had 37 years' prior experience as a police
 3 officer, including six years within Counter Terrorism
 4 Policing Headquarters; is that right?

5 **A.** That is right, yes.

6 **Q.** Your last role, within the CTPHQ, was as Deputy
 7 Assistant Commissioner, in the role of Senior National
 8 Coordinator for Prevent and Pursue, is that right?

9 **A.** That is correct, yes.

10 **Q.** Thank you, and your time in that role ended in
 11 February 2024?

12 **A.** Yes.

13 **Q.** Thank you. You also sell us in your statement, in your
 14 policing role you have experience of chairing or
 15 co-chairing the Lancashire Criminal Justice Board, the
 16 Lancashire Reducing Re-offending Board, and the
 17 Lancashire MAPPA Board, is that right?

18 **A.** That is correct, yes.

19 **Q.** Are you able to just give us a brief précis of your
 20 level of experience in those areas?

21 **A.** Yes. I mean, I was the chair for a number of years, the
 22 MAPPA board was when I was a Detective Superintendent in
 23 charge of, amongst other things, public protection, and
 24 the other two, whilst I was an Assistant Chief Constable
 25 there. So bringing together multi-agency partners

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1 sector, health, school visitors, et cetera.

2 It -- fundamentally, as I see it and certainly how
 3 the Preston panel operates, it is an information sharing
 4 forum. It has no case management facility. It has no
 5 sort of assessment framework or ownership. There is no
 6 ability to allocate or direct. Having said all of that,
 7 and despite it being sort of incomplete in that regard,
 8 it is incredibly popular, if that's the right word. So
 9 30-odd partners regularly attend that meeting from
 10 education and across those authorities and I think they
 11 would only do that if they saw it to be of continuing
 12 value.

13 And practitioners come and sit around the table,
 14 share information about the young people and the
 15 concerns about the young people in order to develop
 16 a wider understanding of their context, the challenges,
 17 and the potential for support. Once that is completed,
 18 then the partners round the table will have a discussion
 19 around who is best placed to support the individual or
 20 their family, to guide them away from negative
 21 influences and provide positive influences.

22 **Q.** So it doesn't have a case management function but you
 23 are discussing individuals and how they should be
 24 managed; is that right?

25 **A.** Yes. So individuals are referred, the details of those

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1 individuals are shared with the relevant partners. This
 2 is all signed up under a confidentiality agreement.
 3 Then those relative partners come to the table, share
 4 their organisation's understanding and records in
 5 relation to that individual and develop that picture and
 6 able to best support and guide those young people away
 7 from negative influences.

8 **Q.** Thank you, and you spoke about it being -- involved the
 9 risks of criminal exploitation. So is this right, it
 10 wouldn't necessarily have direct read-across to the
 11 issues of VFIs but it is experience you have of
 12 multi-agency working with children and young people?

13 **A.** Yes. It is a level that is much lower than VFIs,
 14 I would suggest. Very, very early signs. And the
 15 example that was used when I first got involved is, you
 16 know, a young person turning up with an expensive pair
 17 of trainers or a new phone that would be beyond their
 18 understood financial capabilities and understanding why
 19 that is and exploring are they being influenced by
 20 criminals, are they being exploited, are they being
 21 drawn into criminal work.

22 **Q.** Thank you. We will pick up on some of those potential
 23 multi-agency structures as we go through your evidence.

24 I want to move on, please, to the definition for
 25 "VFIs". This has obviously been covered in some depth

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1 the fundamental question, beyond: are they vulnerable to
 2 being drawn into terrorism? Is: are they vulnerable to
 3 being drawn into extreme violence? For me, ultimately,
 4 that wouldn't necessarily need a definition of
 5 an individual. Yes, we need to understand what that
 6 means and we need to understand what happens
 7 subsequently, but in order -- do we need a specific
 8 definition that applies to an individual in order to get
 9 to there? And I would suggest we don't.

10 **Q.** Are you drawing the distinction between whether the
 11 definition should be of a person or of a behaviour?

12 **A.** Yes, I think understanding -- and if we look at the
 13 category, the FEVMCA, or the other ways of pronouncing
 14 that hideous acronym -- that describes a mindset really,
 15 a state of mind, doesn't it? Which is potentially
 16 helpful to look at what that state of mind means in
 17 relation to the risks that that individual may pose and
 18 therefore what interventions could successfully be
 19 applied against it.

20 So I may or may not be jumping ahead, so please stop
 21 me if I am, but if you look at the recently NIEV
 22 category, that defines an act. That has already
 23 happened, when you look at that category. The FEVMCA
 24 defines a state of mind -- assessed state of mind of
 25 an individual. And then, looking at Professor Cassam's

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1 with a number of witnesses. But just picking up this
 2 with you, you tell us in your witness statement -- and
 3 I don't propose we pull it up, but it is paragraph 49.

4 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Thank you that's very helpful.

5 **MR BOYLE:** That the lack of agreed definition for VFIs means
 6 a lack of clarity about which agency or person holds or
 7 should hold the primary responsibility for managing
 8 VFIs. Is that right?

9 **A.** Yes.

10 **Q.** One of your specific recommendations is that a settled
 11 definition should be reached for VFIs?

12 **A.** It is. There is a "however" I think in that. As I have
 13 considered this further and I am sure we will get onto
 14 the various definitions that are under consideration.
 15 When reflecting on Prevent's practice and relating it to
 16 this particular question, I came to the conclusion that,
 17 within Prevent, we don't define individuals, we don't
 18 categorise individuals. What Prevent does is look at
 19 a test, to see whether or not those individuals are
 20 vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism.

21 When I have looked at the various inputs and
 22 evidence given to the Inquiry around definitions,
 23 I ultimately ask myself: for what purpose is the
 24 definition? And when we are looking at what happens to
 25 those who aren't taken into the Channel process, for me,

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1 input, the "NIVE" proposition that he made, that's
 2 describing a person or a "placeholder" he called it,
 3 isn't it, based on an assessment of their state of mind.

4 So I think it is a definition for what purpose
 5 I think is the summary of that thinking. And
 6 ultimately, certainly at that gateway stage, if somebody
 7 is or isn't dealt with by Prevent, if they are at risk
 8 of being drawn into terrorism or are they at risk at
 9 being drawn into serious crime that isn't terrorism.

10 **Q.** Yes. So the test, which we will come onto, for Prevent
 11 is vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism --

12 **A.** Yes.

13 **Q.** -- it is not vulnerable to becoming a terrorist.

14 **A.** Yes.

15 **Q.** Does that matter in Prevent in your experience?

16 **A.** Well, given that it is an early-stage intervention, it
 17 is a preventative process by its very name, I think it
 18 can and should start much earlier in that cycle in terms
 19 of understanding those pathways that may lead somebody
 20 to being drawn into terrorism, whether that is terrorist
 21 offending or becoming a terrorist and carrying out
 22 terrorist atrocities.

23 **Q.** Yes. So one thing we will pick up on, the point you
 24 make in your statement that people's behaviour can
 25 change and be fluid and so on that basis, do you think

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1 it is more useful for the definition to be of
 2 a behaviour that might subsequently change, rather than
 3 a person?
 4 **A.** I think the reason to have a definition is to understand
 5 what that behaviour may be, why that behaviour may pose
 6 a risk to others and obviously, to that individual
 7 themselves, if they go down that behavioural path and
 8 that continued behaviour.
 9 **Q.** Thank you. Do I take from that then that you prefer --
 10 if you have a view on this, your preference is for NIEV
 11 over NIVE, in that the former describes the act, the
 12 latter describes an individual?
 13 **A.** No, I don't think I have a preference for either, is my
 14 straightforward answer. I think they are describing
 15 different things for different purposes and in terms of
 16 the NIEV Taskforce definition, through the release of
 17 the recent guidance, I don't find that it is potentially
 18 that useful in terms of gateways and thresholds and
 19 considering whether somebody should or shouldn't go
 20 through there.
 21 **Q.** So it has been picked up in questioning, actually by the
 22 learned Chair, that if the definition that you work to
 23 in the preventative space is the act itself, then that's
 24 coming quite a long way further down --
 25 **A.** Yes, it is an end state. It describes an end state.

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1 three elements of that definition. Whereas, I think the
 2 problem is much broader than within the terrorism world
 3 and that is the sort of conversation that we are
 4 exploring and the issues we are exploring.
 5 So to me, that has been constructed within a box of
 6 terrorism or anti-terrorism or counter
 7 terrorism-terrorism thinking, if that makes sense, which
 8 is where I say, ultimately, when I come back to this,
 9 the question is: if you are not at risk of being drawn
 10 into terrorism, and everything that goes into that, the
 11 next question is: are you at risk of being drawn into
 12 serious and violent offending? And if the answer to
 13 that is "yes", we must then determine what to do about
 14 it.

15 **Q.** Thank you. I'm going to move on now, please, to
 16 Prevent. If we could just have up on screen but I don't
 17 propose to go through it in full, but it is page 6,
 18 paragraph 23 IPC000001_0006 of your statement.

19 So at the bottom of the page please. If we could
 20 then turn over. So you go through, very helpfully, the
 21 thresholds throughout a Prevent referral, which
 22 certainly have been covered at various points over the
 23 course of the Inquiry's evidence. If we could just keep
 24 going through that, we see that there are a number of
 25 stages at which thresholds exist in Prevent and I think

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1 Obviously, Prevent and any other process around VFIs
 2 that may or may not come off the back of this Inquiry
 3 and the work, is starting well ahead of that end state
 4 and therefore, the NIEV might be useful for policy, it
 5 might be useful if legislation, et cetera, is to follow
 6 around that, but in terms of assessing whether somebody
 7 is or isn't or should or shouldn't pass through
 8 a gateway, I don't find it that useful. The Home Office
 9 have been fairly open that it is a working definition.
 10 They describe it as neither policy, legal nor operation,
 11 I think is the phrase in their guidance.

12 So I think for me it is there, it is relatively new.
 13 Does it do what it needs to? I'm not so sure if that's
 14 around gateways and thresholds for Prevent and people
 15 coming through that.

16 **Q.** Thank you. We will come onto ways in which that Prevent
 17 definition could potentially be amended.

18 Can I just ask you this. One of the elements of the
 19 NIEV definition is "explicit or implicit attempt to
 20 shock, intimidate or outrage a wider audience". Do you
 21 have a view on that element?

22 **A.** It is probably a follow-on from what I have already said
 23 and I think, when you look at the NIEV definition, it
 24 has been constructed almost in a similar vein to the
 25 definition of terrorism, the three-step test and the

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1 in Phase 1 the question certainly was asked: is this
 2 an overly complicated system with too many steps? But
 3 I think, for our purpose in Phase 2, really the
 4 importance is that perhaps with one anomaly, which you
 5 identify, the statutory test for counter terrorism case
 6 officers to apply, relates to vulnerability to being
 7 drawn into terrorism, as you have already mentioned?

8 **A.** That is correct. That is the legal test.

9 **Q.** Thank you. Covered in evidence with DAC Evans on
 10 [Wednesday] was the Counter Terrorism Policing Prevent
 11 Standard Operating Procedure and we saw, on [Wednesday],
 12 that there is a requirement in that for a terrorism
 13 link.

14 **A.** Yes.

15 **Q.** Is that right?

16 **A.** It is, yes.

17 **Q.** Sir, just for your note CTPHQ000410, page 49.

18 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Thank you.

19 **MR BOYLE:** And in terms of that guidance worked, Mr Jacques,
 20 did you have any view on the standard operating
 21 procedures and the way that the link with terrorism is
 22 set out there?

23 **A.** Yes, I do. I think -- I mean, the statutory test for
 24 somebody to enter into the Channel process is there
 25 needs to be a vulnerability to being drawn into

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1 terrorism. So, there has to be a terrorism link to that
2 vulnerability, for an individual to progress through
3 that gateway. That's a legal requirement.

4 And there is no alternative, and I think the
5 standard operating procedures and where they articulate
6 the kind of acts that could indicate a vulnerability to
7 terrorism as opposed to those that couldn't, I think is
8 very useful to a practitioner to understand where that
9 difference may lie, and to determine, you know, their
10 decision-making based on the Prevent Assessment
11 Framework decisions.

12 Q. Thank you. Can we then move on to the categories that
13 CTCOs apply as they receive a referral?

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. So we know, and you have already mentioned that FEVMCA
16 acronym. You have set that out at page 3,
17 IPC000001_0003 paragraph 11 of your statement, if we
18 could have that on screen, please.

19 So, the second sentence, you say:

20 "... defined as an individual that 'does not appear
21 to have an ideology but seems to have an interest in
22 committing extreme or mass violence, which makes them
23 a concern for Prevent. This could include those
24 interested in school massacres but also where violence
25 is targeted at other settings or individuals and is not

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1 and ultimately, they leave a lot of questions hanging in
2 terms of some of their overlapping nature. To what
3 extent do new and different characteristics appear in
4 the Prevent casework and individuals referred into
5 Prevent? You know, so, what's the extent of misogyny?
6 What's the extent of antisemitism? And lots of things
7 that are currently talked about and people are
8 interested in and how is that driving extreme views,
9 ideological or otherwise? I don't think those
10 categories assist in that conversation at all, is my
11 view.

12 Q. Thank you. So you talk about overlapping categories.
13 There are also: no ideology; other susceptibility to
14 radicalisation identified; no ideology identified; and
15 multiple ideologies with no dominant ideology. Is that
16 right?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. So your point, I think, is that an individual -- it
19 might be difficult to distinguish which of those
20 categories they fall into?

21 A. Yes. From a practitioner's perspective, in the starting
22 point is how do they differentiate, on the information
23 they have got, which at the very starting point of
24 assessing somebody referred into Prevent may be fairly
25 scant information and yes, they can alter that

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1 based on a specific ideological motivation'."

2 You come on to talk about that committing and
3 explain why you have emboldened it, which we will come
4 onto.

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. One point that DAC Evans made in her evidence is that
7 FEVMCA is a category, rather than the test to be applied
8 of vulnerability to being drawn into terrorism. In your
9 experience, and from your discussions with
10 practitioners, do they find the categories helpful in
11 assessing the statutory test?

12 A. I cannot say I could answer that with confidence.

13 I think, my view and when you discuss Prevent with
14 people who aren't Prevent experts and live in this world
15 day to day, is those categories can appear confusing,
16 overlapping. I don't think they necessarily describe
17 the problem that they are looking to address and that
18 they are capturing, and in terms of categorisation, how
19 useful that is to managing an individual, whether they
20 have been categorising one or the other. Because
21 ultimately, the legal test is the legal test and the way
22 that practitioners assess that legal test is through
23 Prevent Assessment Framework process.

24 So, I think the categories -- I mean, they are
25 public, they are released by the Home Office and later,

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1 categorisation as they work through the process and more
2 engagement with that person, you know, if they enter the
3 Channel programme through intervention providers. So it
4 could be the understanding of the drivers or motivations
5 of those individuals and what's making them Prevent
6 relevant will grow, and those categorisations, as
7 understood by the practitioners, may change in relation
8 to that individual, but -- and I go back to the very
9 first part of my role, in terms of wider engagement,
10 which is also in public understanding and confidence in
11 the system -- do those categorisations make sense to the
12 average person, looking outwards in? I am not so sure
13 they do.

14 Q. So, they might be used to prepare statistics but, of
15 course, if those categories aren't helpful, then those
16 statistics may be of lesser use. I think we have had
17 evidence in the Inquiry that the FEVMCA category has
18 been used to try and draw conclusions about the VFI
19 cohort. Is your view that the categories are a useful
20 concept but could be rationalised, or that they not
21 helpful at all?

22 A. Well, I think the FEVMCA category, some people will
23 interpret it as, in and of itself, you are a VFI that
24 should be in Prevent or Channel. But that isn't
25 necessarily the case. It is a categorisation based on

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1 an initial view of the understanding and the concerns
2 that you may present. But the test, based on the
3 assessment, whether you are in a category or not in that
4 category, is what ultimately determines whether you are
5 suitable to go through to Channel for interventions or
6 not. And then the question is: what, if not?

7 **Q.** Can I ask, do you think the categories should be
8 rationalised?

9 **A.** I think it would be helpful if the categories were
10 examined. And as I say, the questions that seem
11 relevant to understand Prevent and the type of concerns
12 that Prevent is dealing with, is what are the features,
13 what are the characteristics? You know, what's the
14 extent of online influence on individuals? Is it driven
15 by, as I say, anti-immigration views, is it driven by
16 anti-semitic views, is it driven by extreme misogyny,
17 et cetera? I think that would be helpful in the public
18 understanding of what Prevent is tackling and dealing
19 with.

20 **Q.** Thank you. Can we move on, then, to specific issues
21 with the FEVMCA definition itself. So I said we would
22 come back to the second part of your paragraph 11, and
23 the last sentence, you say:

24 "I have emphasised word 'committing' within the
25 above definition as from my conversations with some

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1 links to this pathway in being drawn into terrorism,
2 I think is what they would say.

3 **Q.** Is that divergence a concern for you, in terms, if there
4 is one, in the evidence that we have had from Home
5 Office and CTPHQ on "committing"? Is that something you
6 have raised or looked to raise?

7 **A.** I think it's never helpful if Home Office and CTPHQ
8 don't particularly align on things. I think, as I say,
9 because the test is based on Prevent Assessment
10 Framework test and it is a legal test, I don't think the
11 word "committing" makes a significant difference one way
12 or the other in that decision-making process. So I'm
13 not overly concerned about it, I think is my summation.

14 **Q.** Thank you. I want to move, please, onto how the FEVMCA
15 category is being applied in practice and whether there
16 is any confusion or potential for confusion for
17 practitioners when they are looking at the category
18 which doesn't inherently have an ideology, set against
19 the test of whether someone is vulnerable to being drawn
20 into terrorism.

21 Certainly, the definition pre-dating FEVMCA was
22 grappled with in the Inquiry's Phase 1 report. And
23 again, DAC Evans was taken to the comments in that about
24 confusion.

25 I think, in addition to that, you have referred to

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1 Counter Terrorism Policing practitioners at least, this
2 appears to be the defining factor as to whether someone
3 without an ideology is deemed suitable for
4 Prevent/Channel consideration."

5 So, I think we take from that, that the category
6 does seem to be important to practitioners, as you
7 alluded to earlier?

8 **A.** Yes.

9 **Q.** We have had evidence from this from Mr Emmett DAC,
10 evidence about the sort of development of the committing
11 element to the test. But are you able to just expand on
12 the conversations that you have had about it?

13 **A.** Yes, certainly from the conversations I have had, the
14 sort of committing element was in there in the early
15 days of this categorisation. I think it disappeared for
16 a short while. What the feedback from practitioners who
17 found that helpful in helping them make their
18 assessments said that it seems to have gone in new
19 guidance that was published. And I think Vicky Evans,
20 in her evidence, said it was an oversight, it wasn't
21 a deliberate act. But it is something that Prevent
22 practitioners from the policing side making those
23 assessments are very keen to have in their mind when
24 they are making that assessment, rather than just people
25 who are interested in but not potentially -- and it

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1 some other evidence that practitioners were grappling
2 with the guidance as it has developed. You, I think,
3 refer to the Home Office thresholds review, which found
4 a clear inconsistency around the application of Prevent
5 thresholds where referrals in cases don't have a clear
6 ideology. That was in May 2025.

7 Sir, just for your note, it is HOM000090.

8 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Thank you.

9 **MR BOYLE:** Sorry, I'm just trying to find the reference.

10 Yes, paragraph 25 of your statement as well, Mr Jacques.

11 Can I take you, please, to a more up-to-date
12 document which is the Crest questionnaire report that
13 the Inquiry has obtained. So that is ILT000219.

14 Thank you. Could we go please to page 31
15 ILT000219_0031, and the bottom of the page, please.

16 Mr Jacques, I don't know if you are familiar with
17 this document through the evidence of DAC Evans but the
18 background to it is that the Inquiry sent questionnaires
19 to the different CTP regions and received a return from
20 them.

21 And we have, I think, the -- page 31, one of the
22 questions was around training, and you will see there,
23 there was concern from Channel chairs about the training
24 and guidance currently available to them as fairly or
25 very [inadequate].

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1 If we can go over the page, please, ILT000219_00032,
2 you will see there the graph which shows the response
3 for the Channel chairs who were also surveyed. Then
4 there is also the response from CTP as well and you will
5 see, one respondent noticed:

6 "We [are] not set up for this. We have been well
7 versed in the meaning of terrorism and what constitutes
8 terrorist offending but we are not trained or
9 experienced in dealing with individuals with such high
10 levels of complex needs."

11 I think DAC Evans referred, in her evidence, to this
12 and said: well, if you go down and look at the returns,
13 said, well, the return for the return is the question
14 was they were being asked about their ability assess
15 VFIs and not people that fell into the FEVMCA category.
16 I don't know if you are familiar with that evidence,
17 whether you had any views on that, whether you have any
18 concerns, based on the results from these
19 questionnaires?

20 A. I mean, firstly on that quote from the respondent:

21 "We are not set up for this ... well versed in the
22 meaning of terrorism ... not trained in or experienced
23 in dealing with individuals with such high levels of
24 complex needs."

25 Increasingly, over the last number of years, decade
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1 looking to apply the FEVMCA category, that Prevent
2 practitioners really should have an understanding of
3 VFIs and that wider issue, in any event?

4 A. Absolutely. Because within that category -- and I think
5 this was DAC Evans' evidence -- there will be
6 individuals that do meet the threshold test and go
7 through to Channel and others that don't. So it is
8 absolutely vital that practitioners understand, not only
9 the category but what determines the difference for
10 those that should or shouldn't progress through that
11 legal gateway of section 36.

12 Q. When you see returns like this, in your role as Prevent
13 Commissioner, are there any actions that jump off the
14 page for you or any steps that you think might be
15 appropriate?

16 A. I do point out, section 88 -- or paragraph 88, I think
17 the very last bullet point on there, around the training
18 and the adequacy of training and how that -- in such
19 complex matters, particularly for decision makers, that
20 needs to be absolutely robust, tested and constantly
21 dip-sampled. So training is an issue and cross-Prevent
22 training is an issue for the wider agencies and
23 individuals in those agencies subject to the Prevent
24 duty.

25 It is a very large cohort of people but it is very
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1 probably, people who are featured in terrorist
2 investigations, terrorist attacks, are exactly those
3 individuals. So whether or not those respondents, when
4 they started in the terrorism world or the counter
5 terrorism world, that was an issue. It certainly is
6 today, would be my response.

7 I think -- and obviously this is about training and
8 input and understanding in that ever-changing and
9 complex world, and for those Prevent practitioners, and
10 I think I say it somewhere in my statement, that
11 often-cited heavy burden of decision-making, because
12 they know the potential consequence of the wrong
13 decision-making and the scrutiny which will rightly
14 follow those decisions, I think they are grappling to
15 understand that and the guidance.

16 I think, as I say, the CTP standard operating
17 procedures is helpful instruction with that. But in all
18 of these matters, what really matters is not just
19 a change in policy or a change in a document, it is how
20 the practitioners understand and apply that change in
21 a consistent and effective manner. And work like this
22 helps me to understand the current state and where the
23 gaps might be.

24 Q. Would you agree that putting aside the sort of question
25 as to what the respondees meant, that even if they are
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1 important that they understand it, which ultimately goes
2 back to making it as understandable as possible and not
3 over complicating things.

4 Q. From your experience, do you see that as an area where
5 there might be improvement or recommendations made, in
6 terms of the qualities of the training to deal with
7 these issues?

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. Thank you. Just while I pick up on this, can we,
10 please, go to -- let me just give the background. So
11 a successor to Lord Anderson -- we already covered the
12 Lessons for Prevent report -- now, I think the
13 chronology was that the Home Secretary responded to
14 Lord Anderson's recommendations at the same time as the
15 response was given to this Inquiry, so that was on
16 30 June of this year.

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. And you were written to, with Lord Anderson in copy, as
19 the successor and the in-place Prevent Commissioner at
20 that time, is that right?

21 A. That is correct.

22 Q. Thank you. Can I just ask, please, that we pull up your
23 response to the Home Secretary setting out the fact
24 that -- in short, that the recommendations were
25 accepted. So that's IPC000009. So we have your
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1 response to the letter that was sent to you about the
2 recommendations and you say that you welcome the
3 Government's decision to accept the report's
4 recommendations and the programme of work already
5 underway. Can we just go down the page, please. Thank
6 you very much.

7 You talk about the challenge of implementation
8 there. And at the last paragraph you say:

9 "I am keen to understand and monitor the
10 implications of Prevent remaining open to individuals
11 falling within the~... category of 'fascination with
12 extreme violence or mass casualty attacks'
13 (Recommendation 2), particularly in relation to the
14 resourcing requirements and challenges across Local
15 Authorities and Counter Terrorism Policing. I am aware
16 that Channel Panels are managing a high volume of
17 casework which are presenting with increasing risk and
18 complexity, so it is important that they are
19 appropriately supported in delivering against their
20 statutory duties."

21 Does this paragraph show a level of concern with the
22 "Fascination with Extreme Violence or Mass Casualty
23 Attacks" category as it is being applied?

24 A. I think it demonstrates a level of concern that the well
25 publicised increases in Channel referrals and cases

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1 A. Yes.

2 Q. I think the point here is that that's defined for
3 individuals who may be drawn into terrorism, not for
4 VFIs or any wider cohort; is that right?

5 A. That is correct, yes.

6 Q. That resourcing is set upon terrorism risk. So, the
7 FEVMCA may place a kind of resourcing challenge upon CTP
8 and Channel, is that right?

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. Thank you, and if we go over the page IPC000001_0014.
11 I think your point (d), correct me if I'm wrong, but you
12 are referring to the importance of ideology and the way
13 that Prevent and channel have worked over time, is that
14 right?

15 A. Yes. Historically, where there was much more clear
16 definition of ideological factors and people who were in
17 Channel, the interventions -- framework and
18 interventions able to be deployed with those people to
19 support them away from terrorism were often theology
20 and/or ideology relevant. As I say, that has changed
21 and that's changed over a good number of years as we see
22 more people coming through with complex needs and those
23 fundamental unmet needs, which may be driving this
24 behaviour, which may be drawing them towards terrorism.
25 So that's how it started. It is still, of course,

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1 going through to the Channel panel, alongside anecdotal
2 feedback from Channel chairs as well as Channel
3 participates as well as those making decisions, that
4 this increasing number and the FEVMCA category, which is
5 potentially interpreted as not being counter terrorism,
6 that concern was playing out when I was speaking to
7 people involved in this system, I think, yes.

8 Q. Thank you. Just before we break, just a little bit
9 further progress, if I may, on this topic. Could we
10 have your statement at page 13 IPC000001_0013,
11 paragraph 45.

12 Thank you very much. So you are, I think, here
13 proposing -- you are forward looking, that changes might
14 be made, but it does tell us your views as well about
15 the status quo because you talk about the challenges of
16 the current FEVMCA being an open category that's
17 continued to be used and you set out some explanation of
18 that at paragraphs (a) to (e).

19 So, I think, point (a), you are, again, talking
20 about this slight tension between that definition and
21 the vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism test; is
22 that right?

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. You talk, at (b), about the Prevent Assessment
25 Framework.

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1 a really important factor in Channel cases, where there
2 is a confirmed or defined ideology. But it is now
3 changing, but has it changed far enough?

4 If VFIs, as a whole, were to end up in Channel,
5 whether they or they don't, the question is: what does
6 an intervention look like on somebody to support them
7 not posing a threat to others and themselves?

8 Q. Thank you. Then (e) I think is the categorisation
9 issues that we have already covered?

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. So please correct me if I summarise your statement
12 incorrectly but is this right, your view is that the
13 position has improved in terms of the way Prevent is
14 handling these FEVMCA referrals, is that right?

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. But that practitioners are still finding the category
17 difficult to apply?

18 A. Yes, I think and the indication from the training and
19 the survey would go to that, I think -- and the evidence
20 that has been received here and the interim guidance and
21 the SOPs, et cetera, is hoping to address that and
22 support those practitioners in the decision-making and
23 I also think that obviously people are waiting for the
24 outcome of this Inquiry and what does that mean for
25 being in or out, or a subset of them being in and others

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1 not. But I think the guidance from CTP is very clear to
 2 practitioners. It is whether that guidance is fully
 3 understood and implemented, is the question.
 4 **Q.** Thank you. So it might be that no matter how good the
 5 guidance is, the concept is quite a difficult one and
 6 therefore practitioners will find it challenging?
 7 **A.** Yes, it shouldn't be beyond those practitioners if
 8 adequately explained and they have the chance to explore
 9 it. You know, that pathway into terrorism, ultimately,
 10 is what Prevent and Prevent practitioners are there to
 11 determine. And as I say, within the SOPs particularly,
 12 where it talks about what is more likely to indicate
 13 that, in terms of actions or fascination with school
 14 massacres, et cetera, as opposed to somebody who has
 15 a personal grievance against another individual that
 16 they are connected to. So I think it is improving and
 17 I haven't spoken to lots and lots of practitioners but
 18 I know that that is the sense.

19 But I think, through all the work that has been done
 20 with the SOPs, with the training -- and I attended the
 21 assessment framework training -- I think lots has been
 22 done to understand and help practitioners understand the
 23 absence of ideology, but potentially draws a terrorism
 24 link which doesn't help, I think, in the training --
 25 they call it a terrorism link in the training -- it is

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1 possible for Prevent to capture all of the VFI cohort?
 2 **A.** I think CTP would say those that should be in Prevent
 3 are those which are assessed to meet the legal gateway
 4 to being vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism.
 5 I think that there will also be other potentially
 6 serious cases that aren't assessed to be that and the
 7 question, therefore, is, if it is not in Channel, how is
 8 that managed?

9 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Where are they to go?

10 **A.** Where are they to go, yes.

11 **MR BOYLE:** Thank you, Mr Jacques. It is unfair of me to ask
 12 you what CTP say, but I think you have provided your
 13 gloss on it, so I'm grateful for that.

14 As you touched on, we know there is no obvious VFI
 15 pathway at this stage. Can I just ask you about what
 16 conclusions can be drawn about current Prevent --
 17 refused Prevent referrals that are signposted to other
 18 agencies. I think some work has been done in the Below
 19 Thresholds pilot by the Home Office, which involved
 20 those cases being taken to another type of multi-agency
 21 panel.

22 Is that something you are familiar with? Have you
 23 been able to scrutinise that pilot in any way?

24 **A.** I am aware of it, not in detail. And I think, in
 25 relatively high-level, general terms, there are issues

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1 more how that vulnerability would evidence them being
 2 drawn into terrorism. So they're not there, but they
 3 could be there because of the nature of the material
 4 that they are viewing.

5 **MR BOYLE:** Thank you. We will come onto whether changes
 6 might help with this. Sir, can I suggest that as
 7 a moment to break and that we maybe take until 3.20 pm?

8 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Certainly. We will come back at
 9 3.20 pm.

10 **(3.06 pm)**

11 **(A short break)**

12 **(3.19 pm)**

13 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Yes, Mr Boyle.

14 **MR BOYLE:** Mr Jacques, putting aside now the difficulties
 15 with applying definitions, as readily accepted by
 16 everyone I think that there is a gap between the FEVMCA
 17 definition and the wider cohort of VFIs, in other words,
 18 Prevent's vulnerability to terrorism will not pull in
 19 all VFIs, is that right?

20 **A.** That is correct, yes.

21 **Q.** Just to kind of summarise that gap -- tell me if this is
 22 an over simplification -- to suggest that CTP consider
 23 that the most serious cases, without ideology, should
 24 fall within Prevent and that's for good reason because
 25 potential vulnerability to terrorism, but that it is not

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1 with the feedback loop around that. Should there or
 2 shouldn't there be a feedback to CTP? How is that
 3 managed and owned? And that ownership responsibility.
 4 Connectivity into wider safeguarding structures and
 5 thresholds within those different safeguarding
 6 structures, are the kind of issues that I think are
 7 cited as the problems, if something isn't in Channel,
 8 which is very clearly defined as a process. But if it
 9 is not in Channel, who does it sit with, who is
 10 responsible, what are their thresholds and what are
 11 their other responsibilities and how is that managed to
 12 make sure that individuals or issues don't fall between
 13 the gaps?

14 **Q.** Thank you. So, very shortly we will come onto the
 15 changes that might be made to establish some of these
 16 things that you are talking about. But is this right,
 17 at the moment, there is no visibility on what might
 18 happen to those rejected referrals?

19 **A.** That's my understanding, yes.

20 **Q.** Thank you. So, you have helpfully engaged in your
 21 statement with a number of different possible changes
 22 that could be made to solve the problems that we have
 23 identified -- or you have identified in your evidence.

24 The first would be widening the definition of
 25 "terrorism", and I think you have already touched on

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1 helpfully the challenges of determining ideology, that
 2 it might change and that it is difficult to do on
 3 preliminary information at the start of a referral. So,
 4 I think the question that might legitimately be asked is
 5 whether ideology actually matters or whether the focus
 6 should instead be on risk. What's your view on that?

7 **A.** Fundamentally, my view is risk is the most important
 8 issue and as terrorism legislation is currently defined
 9 and therefore the section 36 legal gateway is defined,
 10 a terrorist ideology or a vulnerability to be drawn into
 11 terrorism matters for that process.

12 Beyond that decision-making point and that legal
 13 threshold, I'm not overly convinced about the necessity
 14 for an ideology or non-ideology in any definition of
 15 those that fall outside it because I think it is about
 16 the risk that they pose of committing serious harm or
 17 extreme violence or serious violence, wherever that
 18 lands.

19 And, ultimately, it is about how that risk is
 20 mitigated, through interventions, supporting those
 21 individuals away from whatever influences are leading to
 22 them creating that risk and also protecting the public
 23 from any actions they make take in furtherance of that
 24 risk.

25 **Q.** I think you said you are not concerned with ideology
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1 Prevent, do you -- perhaps slightly beyond your role in
 2 that you are Prevent Commissioner, but do you have
 3 a view on that former proposition?

4 **A.** I do. Yes, I do think that if you change the terrorism
 5 legislation and change the nature of what terrorism is,
 6 as currently legally defined in the UK, there are much
 7 wider issues around that. Personally, as you say, it is
 8 not within my remit necessarily. And as the current
 9 Commissioner, personally, I wouldn't be in favour of
 10 that, and I have previously stated that so it is only
 11 fair that I re-state it.

12 **Q.** Yes, of course, you have experience from your role in
 13 CTPHQ of being involved in the Pursue side of things as
 14 well. Thank you.

15 Moving on, then, to the definition of Prevent. We
 16 have talked about the way this might happen but you
 17 could amend the section 26 and 36 tests so that the
 18 Prevent duty included, for example "vulnerability to
 19 being drawn into terrorism, extreme violence and mass
 20 casualty attacks", or something along those lines.

21 That would effectively change the scope of Prevent
 22 to pull in the wider VFI cohort, do you agree?

23 **A.** If that change was made, yes, I do agree with that.

24 **Q.** So you have already given your view that you wouldn't
 25 support such a change. Can we just break down how that

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1 being applied to those cases which fall outside Prevent,
 2 is that right?

3 **A.** Yes.

4 **Q.** Are you talking then with a view to how things are at
 5 the moment or are you saying that you think that the
 6 current Prevent test should stay as it is?

7 **A.** I think the Prevent test should stay as it is. But
 8 I think what my point is -- and it may or may not be
 9 particularly relevant -- is grappling to define
 10 something as ideological or non-ideological for
 11 something that doesn't go through Prevent, I am not sure
 12 of the utility of that, particularly when you might
 13 enter into issues of nihilism or misanthropy; are they
 14 ideologies or are they not ideologies? I think the test
 15 is: is there a risk of serious violence emanating from
 16 the assessment of this individual and if there is, what
 17 do we do about it?

18 **Q.** Just before we move onto Prevent, just engaging with,
 19 first, about the change of the entire definition of
 20 terrorism. That was obviously something that
 21 Jonathan Hall KC, as the Independent Review of Terrorism
 22 Legislation looked into and cautioned against and we
 23 have heard the same views from Mr Basu and also
 24 DAC Evans.

25 Before we come onto the changing of definition of
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1 might look?

2 So, first of all, impact on resources. You tell
 3 us -- and no need to pull it up -- but your
 4 paragraph 31, that many within the Prevent system have
 5 cited workload volumes as an increasing source of
 6 pressure. Are you just able to tell us a bit more about
 7 who is raising that sort of issue and the effects that
 8 they are having?

9 **A.** Yes, I mean that is a very broad statement. You know,
 10 we look at things like Sir Ken McCallum's threat update
 11 around countering terrorism, national security threats
 12 more broadly, which Counter Terrorism Policing, from the
 13 police side of things, is responsible for other matters
 14 of national security, state threats, Official Secrets
 15 Act, war crime investigations. So, I know Counter
 16 Terrorism Policing would say, all of those are being
 17 stretched simultaneously. And then, in much wider
 18 taking on of responsibilities, beyond those issues,
 19 could have negative consequences on those issues but
 20 also on their ability do something that is currently not
 21 within their sort of remit or purview.

22 **Q.** Thank you. We had the evidence of DAC Evans that the
 23 current approach is not sustainable as a long-term
 24 response. Is that consistent with your view and the
 25 work that you are doing?

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1 A. I think, in terms of where Prevent finds itself, in
2 terms of that assessment framework, the FEVMCA category
3 and some of those meeting the thresholds and some of
4 those don't, I think that is potentially sustainable.
5 I think what isn't sustainable or acceptable to anybody
6 is those that don't meet that threshold, the ability to
7 understand, manage that risk across a wide system, is
8 still not where it needs to be.

9 I think, taking on the wider responsibility, so
10 those below that threshold into Prevent, certainly at
11 this stage, I'm not sure Prevent is the right place for
12 that. There are wider safeguarding issues. Frontline
13 policing, local policing and others are much more
14 accustomed to dealing with safeguarding issues. We have
15 seen, I think released this week, the report from the
16 HMICFRS around Prevent and safeguarding, that Counter
17 Terrorism Policing generally has more to go, in general
18 safeguarding terms, and therefore putting these issues,
19 that don't fit within the definition of terrorism,
20 within the section 36, into Prevent isn't necessarily
21 the best place to put them.

22 Wherever that responsibility lies, there will be
23 issues of resourcing, prioritisation, et cetera, and
24 I also think this is -- because there are some of these
25 cases at that higher end, that rightly should be in

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1 involved in whatever that triaging function is.
2 Q. Thank you. So just thinking about how this -- how
3 a change might be effected. If it is going to be new
4 legislation, that's obviously going to take time to be
5 drafted and passed. So, one question might be whether
6 Prevent can continue to do that interim triaging role in
7 the short to medium term. Do I take from your answers
8 that, in your view, that does seem to be possible?

9 A. I think that is possible and yes. It is the current
10 status quo and I don't see an immediately better option.
11 There are pilots in place, as I say, and Prevent and
12 policing -- and local policing, and safeguarding, local
13 authorities and other partners are looking -- there was
14 a statement from Superintendent Steve Watkins, I think,
15 around what's going on there. There is lots of things
16 being tried out there, but in the here and now, I think
17 Prevent is the place that stays with us until something
18 is defined elsewhere.

19 Q. Just taking this by stages. Channel, firstly, your view
20 is it is not appropriate because it is focused on
21 counter terrorism risk. But I think you do also say in
22 your statement that the way that local authorities are
23 funded might mean that the resourcing pressure on
24 Channel, if the Prevent definition was widened, would be
25 trickier to address; is that right?

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1 Prevent and Channel because of its closeness or
2 potential to become terrorism, drawn into terrorism, it
3 doesn't mean that everything else that isn't should sit
4 within what is essentially counter terrorism response.

5 Q. So it is too narrow to look purely at the resource
6 implications of this, is your point?

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. Just on the resourcing perspective, I think you said
9 that the current position for Prevent is acceptable,
10 from a resource perspective. Do I take from that, in
11 your view, is Prevent already carrying out that kind of
12 wider triage role at the moment?

13 A. In effect, it is, yes. I'm not advocating that that
14 should remain the case where it is the sole responsible
15 place or authority for that wider triage. No, I don't
16 think that is. I think prevent absolutely should
17 maintain its role in that wider triaging process and in
18 evidence given to this Inquiry and other things that I'm
19 aware of, there are local authority areas using parallel
20 referral processes, so if something goes into Prevent is
21 also goes into the safeguarding, whether that is a MASH,
22 local authority, and those processes running parallel
23 but in a connected way.

24 So I don't think Prevent should remain this single
25 triage function necessarily, but it absolutely should be

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1 A. Yes and I think, again, speaking to Channel panel chairs
2 and Prevent practitioners and professionals within local
3 authorities -- and as I was doing last week in
4 Birmingham -- there is genuine and serious concern about
5 the lack of resources. They would say in lots of places
6 the removal of resources in local authorities to carry
7 on dealing with this where there is increasing
8 complexity, increasing workloads. So to say: well, this
9 is the permanent state and there is no further
10 resourcing or solution coming down there, would cause
11 a great deal further anxiety.

12 Q. Thank you. You have already raised the prospect of
13 whether a different body might perhaps take rejected
14 referrals and we have talked about the lack of
15 visibility in that context. Just before we come onto
16 that, I raised the idea of Prevent being an interim
17 triage service. Are there any changes that you think
18 would need to be made to Prevent, aside from that
19 hand-off route, for that to occur?

20 A. The most promising thing that I have seen is interim
21 measures which is happening in some places and not in
22 others, is that parallel referral process, with the
23 Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub if one exists or whatever
24 the equivalent is in a local authority area. It is
25 really important that, particularly those that fall

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1 below that threshold, are connected into local
 2 safeguarding and local risk management processes,
 3 however they are constructed within that area, yes.
 4 Q. Can I just understand, the parallel referral, is that
 5 being made at the point that the Prevent referral is
 6 made, or later down the line?
 7 A. No, as I understand it, that is at the time the Prevent
 8 referral is made. So Prevent receive the details to do
 9 their checks and the safeguarding authorities similarly
 10 do their checks. They talk and communicate to each
 11 other, hopefully, to understand where things are. But
 12 it -- what happens is, as Prevent goes through its
 13 various stages, if it goes through information gathering
 14 stages, et cetera, what it doesn't do is stop any
 15 immediate safeguarding interventions if they're needed
 16 with individuals, whether that safeguarding information
 17 is currently relevant, et cetera. So for me, that seems
 18 like good practice in the absence of something
 19 significantly different from what exists now.
 20 Q. Thank you. I suppose what might be missing a little bit
 21 later down the line is if that case is rejected by
 22 Prevent, the safeguarding process continues but without
 23 a policing or law enforcement perspective --
 24 A. I think ultimately, policing needs to be -- if you look
 25 at the MASH -- and my experience from a number of years

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1 Q. Yes, thank you. I will come onto consider both with
 2 you. (k) IPC000001_0025, perhaps in line with the
 3 parallel referrals we have been talking about, but:
 4 "... connectivity between Prevent and wider
 5 safeguarding systems ..."
 6 Is that right?
 7 A. Yes.
 8 Q. And (m):
 9 "Strengthen oversight and outcome monitoring ..."
 10 So over the page, if we may, IPC000001_0026, you
 11 refer to:
 12 "... monitoring of post-Channel outcomes, visibility
 13 of onward referrals, clearer accountability for risk
 14 escalation and performance measures relating
 15 specifically to VFI cases ..."
 16 I think as part of those concepts you said you were
 17 talking about the PDP panels. So we heard from
 18 DS Watkins about those. Are they, in your view, a
 19 possible option for accepting -- if that's the right way
 20 of putting it -- rejected Prevent referrals?
 21 A. They are a possible option. I think where my thinking
 22 is -- and, you know, I am not an expert in these matters
 23 and I have -- I have an expert's panel on safeguarding
 24 and other things -- but there are a number of fora out
 25 there, multi-agency Child Exploitation Panels or

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1 ago, is the MASH in Lancashire, policing are absolutely
 2 involved in that. So local policing would be part of
 3 that process within the local safeguarding -- you know,
 4 parallel referral, if that makes sense.
 5 Q. Thank you. Can I pick up, please, on some of your
 6 recommendations and we will move on to the hand-off
 7 process. So could we have, please, page 24
 8 IPC000001_0024 of your statement, it is paragraph 88.
 9 And we are looking at sub-paragraph (f). So you made
 10 a number of helpful suggestions in your statement. So
 11 (f) is:
 12 "Strengthen alternative pathways beyond Channel ..."
 13 I think we have covered the issues that you have
 14 raised there. But:
 15 "... lack of mature alternative pathways once
 16 a determination has been made that a person is not
 17 vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism."
 18 If we move on to (g), you talk about the expansion
 19 of MAPPA:
 20 "Consideration should be given to adapting or
 21 expanding MAPPA to accommodate VFI cases where CT
 22 [Police] assesses that terrorism concerns are absent."
 23 A. Sorry, just on that one, I'm mostly referring and, maybe
 24 not very clearly, to the Potentially Dangerous Persons
 25 process, that is a non-statutory element of MAPPA.

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1 Criminal Exploitation Panels. There are Potentially
 2 Dangerous People Panels. There is MAPPA, as we
 3 understand MAPPA in terms of its statutory form. There
 4 are things like the Prevention Partnership Panels at the
 5 very low end. There is a whole plethora, potentially,
 6 of multi-agency fora, all of which seem to operate in
 7 isolation in not necessarily a coherent and coordinated
 8 way.
 9 Without wanting to be too vague on this, I think the
 10 answer is out there within those fora, constituted
 11 locally, but with additional guidance, a duty,
 12 a coordinating function. That it might be relevant
 13 depending on the assessment of an individual that
 14 doesn't make it through the Prevent gateway, to go to
 15 this coordinating fora, whether it is through a MASH or
 16 otherwise, but MASH seems to be the most sensible place
 17 that I can think of at the moment. That the
 18 multi-agency Criminal Exploitation Partnership is the
 19 place that that individual should be allocated to and
 20 owned by and report back into whatever the coordinating
 21 function is.
 22 So there is a lot of these places out there. They
 23 are constituted slightly different in different places,
 24 potentially relevant to the local context, local need,
 25 or maybe even local political preference or resourcing.

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1 And all of them may have a role, depending on where
 2 those individuals fall and the assessment of what is
 3 driving that vulnerability and that risk that they
 4 present to themselves and others. But the critical
 5 element of that is a coordinating function that
 6 clarifies ownership and accountability.

7 Q. Thank you. So I ask you these questions firstly to you
 8 as Prevent Commissioner with some visibility of the
 9 cases that are exiting Prevent, but I think also with
 10 your history in multi-agency working.

11 Just before we look at what new -- which structures
 12 may be co-opted for VFIs, can I just ask again, as
 13 an interim position, you positioned PDP. Do you have
 14 a view of that as a kind of interim body that might
 15 quickly be put in place to accept a rejected Prevent
 16 referral?

17 A. I was very struck with the statement of DS Watkins in
 18 terms of the process there, for people not meeting or
 19 being handed down or off from Channel into that process
 20 and the management of that. So I think it is -- on the
 21 basis of that, and what else I know about it, it is
 22 a good option. There may be others or better and there
 23 may be better people than I to determine what that is.

24 Q. Thank you. I won't ask you to commit.

25 Moving on then to the VFI pathway and how that might

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1 Q. Is this right, MAPPA will have a chair?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. And that will be either from policing or probation,
 4 depending on the subject?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. Thank you, and is this right, is there a lead agency as
 7 well within MAPPA?

8 A. There is a series of levels; is it single agency-led, is
 9 it multi-agency, is it enhanced multi-agency work? But
 10 what that framework gives everybody in the room, and
 11 everybody involved, is absolute clarity on who is
 12 responsible for delivery what. Ultimately, the chair is
 13 accountable for the success of the MAPPA processes.
 14 Seniors within different agencies, whether that is
 15 police, probation or other, will be responsible for
 16 actions allocated to them within that process. So there
 17 is a clear process of understanding what is required of
 18 you and what isn't required of you and you are held to
 19 account for that through that process.

20 Q. I don't know if you are familiar with the evidence we
 21 had from your expert cadre, that the naming of a lead
 22 agency can be disadvantageous, because other agencies
 23 then rely on them and might withdraw. Again, perhaps
 24 relying more on your background in multi-agency working,
 25 do you have a view on that?

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1 look. You made the point in your recommendations at 88,
 2 paragraph (d). So I think it is two pages back on
 3 page 24 IPC000001_0024, the importance of clear
 4 ownership of VFI cases. Do you have a view on whether
 5 there should be a single named agency that should be
 6 taking ownership of those VFI cases and whether there is
 7 kind of any comparative good practice with Prevent that
 8 you can draw on?

9 A. I think, whether it is an agency or an individual within
 10 an agency level, there is an awful lot of merit in
 11 someone knowing, even within a multi-agency setting,
 12 that they are the responsible person, the responsible
 13 authority. So potentially responsible for chasing other
 14 partners within that multi-agency forum, for ensuring
 15 they have done whatever they needed to do, or committed
 16 to do, or actioned to do, and the discussions around
 17 that.

18 So I think ownership and accountability, even within
 19 multi-agency fora, is critical to success.

20 Q. We covered, in your background, your time as a MAPPA
 21 chair and you mention in your statement some of the
 22 concepts of MAPPA that you think would be useful in
 23 multi-agency working and you have already referred to
 24 duty to co-operate.

25 A. Yes.

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1 A. I think -- I can see why that view would be suggested
 2 but, of course, if it was a successful multi-agency
 3 partnership and the partners were signed up to, they
 4 would understand they have a responsibility within that.
 5 Like I say, it may be the chair that is ultimately
 6 accountable but agencies have to be accountable, whether
 7 it is a lead coordinating agency -- and I think that is
 8 a sensible proposition -- those agencies and the senior
 9 people responsible for those agencies also have to
 10 understand that they are accountable for delivering what
 11 is required of their agency.

12 The police can't deliver a mental health
 13 intervention. You know, each agency, depending on the
 14 assessed needs of the individual and the risk they pose
 15 from the MAPPA perspective, needs to be accountability
 16 of their own. But you need to have a lead and
 17 coordinated, nominated individual.

18 Q. Thank you. Can we move on then, please, to the Big
 19 Front Door concept. Now, made effectively by your
 20 predecessor as Prevent Commissioner. You address this
 21 in your statement at page 21, IPC000001_0021
 22 paragraph 77. Starting from the middle of that
 23 paragraph. Well, actually, I think worth reading all of
 24 it. So:

"I take the view that in VFI case, Prevent staff

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should at least be part of any initial assessment, potentially in conjunction with or as part of a wider triage function, because at that stage it is difficult to determine whether something is terrorism related or not, particularly given the similarities in the types of offences carried out by VFI and terrorist offenders.

I also strongly believe that in terms of encouraging referrals and given the complexities of determining the precise nature of any risk or vulnerability in an initial stage, we should not expect the referrer to choose between separate referral routes. This should apply equally to a potentially seasoned professional as much as it should to an inexperienced member of the public with a genuine concern."

So, is this right, you don't think it would be right to ask teachers, family members, to consider whether the individual they are referring is vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism or violence-fixated or any other definition?

A. That is correct, yes.

Q. And does that mean that, from your perspective, a Big Front Door is inevitable if Prevent is retained in its current form?

A. I think the front door, big, wide or otherwise, is describing a connected system between what currently

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paragraph 53. Issues that have already been covered in evidence, no statutory footing, not underpinned by a national policy and wide variation in delivery.

A. Yes.

Q. Do you have a view, from your policing experience, as to whether those issues can be surmounted? Whether MASH is suitable for adaptation to this role?

A. I think they could be surmounted. I think the challenges, and depending how MASHs are constituted, will be, again, resourcing, experience. You know, certain MASHs will just look at what they call "traditional safeguarding". So the vulnerability of the individual, not necessarily the vulnerability and the risk they may pose to others. So that would be the change in terms of approach, in terms of potentially culture. But, again, from my personal experience and this is relatively limited in terms of my more recent role, practitioners understand that, school teachers understand that, early help professionals understand that, social care workers understand that.

So if there is any sort of legacy, whether that is institutional, whether it is guidance or policy, I think practitioners get it because this is the world that they are operating in and living with and dealing with these people, whether they be adults or children on a regular

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sits in Prevent and Channel and what doesn't; what should sit elsewhere in terms of coordinating function.

So if there were separate reporting mechanisms in there, that would be suboptimal, in my view. It might be a necessity in terms of resourcing or whatever it is, but it is around those two elements being connected and understanding -- and that's why the parallel referral system for me, as an interim measure, is good.

So, you know, the difficulties and challenges of defining what is or isn't terrorism, or what may or may not become terrorism, has been played out in this Inquiry and lots of other fora, when we talk about the definition of terrorism. What we shouldn't do is introduce any dilemma and potential reason for not referring to practitioners because they don't know which pathway, if two pathways existed, to go down.

Q. Thank you. Now, in terms of who would carry out that screening and triage, we have in some ways touched on this when we have been looking at an interim position, but is this right, was your view that MASH -- you agree with Lord Anderson that MASH is the most appropriate body to evolve into that role?

A. I do.

Q. Thank you, and you note issues with MASH in your witness statement. We do not need it up, but it is

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basis.

Q. Thank you. I think we heard from Ms Gianfrancesco, that from her experience, there is a bit of reasonable variation on that question. But your experience has been, broadly, that people do understand the distinction of risk to and from --

A. Yes, and I think, again, speaking from personal experience, what potentially drives that is workloads, resourcing, pressure on the workforce and thinking: well, if our responsibility becomes broader and wider, how on earth are we going to cope with that, with the responsibilities that we have already got? So I do not think it is a sort of standpoint based on animosity or ideology or anything like that. I think it is a workload issue, that people say: this is what we do, I'm not so sure we could do this and this together because my workload, my caseload is stacked already.

Q. If the MASH were to have local policing and CTP within it, then would that also incorporate more of a public protection assessment and perspective?

A. Yes. I think it needs safeguarding, authorities, social care, children's social services, it needs policing and it needs Counter Terrorism Policing, or connectivity at the very least, to be able to operate effectively. It needs people like health -- in terms of what happened

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next, it needs health, it needs criminal justice, it needs mental health provision, et cetera. So -- education as well. They are well understood statutory authorities that have a role in safeguarding and it should constitute all of those, to look at the wider problem.

Q. Thank you. Now, you also talk in your statement -- sir, just for your note, paragraph 29 -- about the idea that the triage assessment is a little bit wider than simply triaging. So I think you refer to tracking and transfer and parallel management of cases between various structures and maintaining oversight governance and accountability across the system.

So would you see the Big Front Door as having an ongoing case management function?

A. Yes. I think it needs that oversight function because -- and I talk about this elsewhere in my statement -- somebody maybe in Prevent or Channel and then ultimately, determine there isn't a vulnerability to being drawn into terrorism; this is non-ideological, non-terrorism linked and they may be better managed somewhere else. So those -- whatever those systems are, they need to be connected and having that single coordinating authority, MASH or otherwise, to be the body that oversees that and the allocation and the

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mitigated and potentially it could be more effective.

I don't think we are anywhere near that being possible at this stage and, again, it is a personal view but based on conversations, if a parallel system was in place alongside Prevent, as a first step, further work, further down the line can be done to see does Prevent become part of that wider system, or is that something -- they are working effectively together, the handovers are done where necessary and if necessary and that doesn't sort of interrupt the interventions.

There is nothing to say that if you look at Channel, intervention providers particularly, if you are exiting from a Channel process into a wider safeguarding, that that intervention provider can't also work in that space, particularly if you are dealing with those vulnerabilities that haven't developed into fixed ideology or fixed terrorism mindset. So a lot of the underpinning -- and the Home Office has done a lot of work to improve interventions available within the Channel programme that are not directly terrorism-related, it is all the under-pinning structures around unmet needs and sense of belonging, et cetera. So intervention providers potentially could transfer with the individual.

SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: It could all eventually sort of meld

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transfer, inter-connectivity around those is very important.

Q. If we were to take a longer-term view, is this right, might that transfer, even if it is being overseen by some sort of triaging body, carry a risk, in and of itself? Because even if you are transferring from one pathway to another, with oversight, you still might have change of practitioners, you might have loss of information, as the transfer takes place? The alternative might be a more generalised public protection pathway, rather than having a Big Front Door with Prevent, VFI, other pathways sitting behind it. Do you have a view on that? Obviously, it would potentially involve a fairly fundamental change to multi-agency working, including Prevent itself?

A. Yes, I think there are a number of benefits to that, as a long-term outcome. If you have got the relevant professionals and the access to the relevant information on the system. So thinking of Prevent, specifically, one of the issues with Prevent and one of the challenges Prevent faces constantly is because it is connected to terrorism, and terrorism heightens levels of concern, potentially heightens levels of stigma by being in a counter terrorism programme, if it were part of a wider prevention system, some of those issues would be

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into one larger organisation, but depending, completely, on how successful the short and medium term have been --

A. Yes.

SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: -- in sorting out those stages?

A. That is right, sir. I think I would be very reluctant to say that that should happen now. I think --

SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Yes, over-ambition?

A. Yes. If there are successful first steps, that is a question of a logical next step to be considered. May or may not be effective. May or may not be necessary, if those systems are running very well in harmony.

MR BOYLE: Thank you. I'm going to move on now to online harms, please. I wanted to, please, pull up on the screen your statement at page 17 IPC000001_0017 and paragraph 61. So you have quoted in the previous paragraph Lord Anderson's report, which first raised this, but you say from your own perspective, you would:

"... like to see further development of how individuals susceptible to being drawn into terrorism could be identified through their engagement in online activities and effectively moved into supportive interventions through the Channel process. Prevent practitioners and policymakers should be innovating in this area to ensure these risks are identified sooner, and they should be supported in doing so."

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1 Now, I think we have had some evidence, I think
 2 Mr Emmett refers to pilots in this area, but I would ask
 3 you, I think, not to go into unnecessary detail about
 4 those pilots which may bring in sensitivities. But in
 5 general terms, do you have a view on how feasible that
 6 exercise would be?
 7 **A.** I think in general terms, it is very difficult. It is
 8 a very difficult area and it is not something --
 9 I haven't spent a lot of time looking into this. I'm
 10 obviously aware of the conversations and the challenges
 11 around that in terms of the big tech companies, the
 12 monitoring aspect of that. For Prevent, this is
 13 a pre-criminal, early intervention stage. So how far
 14 down monitoring individuals in that space is legal and
 15 lawful and desirable? These are all big issues.
 16 What I can say -- and through my policing career,
 17 through this role and through my other role -- is that
 18 the influence of online harms on especially young
 19 people -- and the vast majority in Prevent are young
 20 people, but not only young people, other vulnerable
 21 people -- it is the most significant driver of change,
 22 in my view.
 23 So how we tackle it and where the line is drawn
 24 about what is and isn't acceptable is a real outstanding
 25 question that UK Plc and the Government and

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1 people.
 2 **Q.** Thank you. Just on this specific sub-point of kind of
 3 what has been called open-source intelligence, in other
 4 words, looking at openly available parts of the
 5 internet. One thing that you helpfully assist on in
 6 your statement is the influence of the Regulation of
 7 Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA). Can you help on
 8 the practical effect of this in law enforcement from
 9 your experience?
 10 **A.** Yes, RIPA, rightly and understandably, controls the
 11 State or law enforcement authorities, in terms of
 12 intrusion, ultimately, in effecting its powers. And
 13 from the high end, it will be things like covert
 14 monitoring of subjects within the house, et cetera,
 15 et cetera, and all of those kind of things. At this
 16 stage, in this pre-criminal stage and within Prevent,
 17 what is openly available information, so, a member of
 18 the public could log on to these social media sites and
 19 look at what Tim Jacques is saying on a daily basis, if
 20 I'm posting on a daily basis, on whatever platform
 21 I choose to post in an open manner. So the general
 22 public can look at that every day, if they wish. They
 23 can have an alert every time I say something
 24 meaningful -- which wouldn't be very often probably --
 25 but the State and law enforcement is limited.

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1 practitioners need to understand.
 2 **Q.** Thank you. Obviously you are saying that this is
 3 difficult for Prevent to do.
 4 **A.** Yes.
 5 **Q.** It might be something that we pick up with others but of
 6 course, from the Inquiry's perspective, the question
 7 might be whether Violence Fixated Individuals could be
 8 identified in this way, through their engagement with
 9 online activities and it might be that that's more
 10 challenging still because they are not necessarily
 11 operating in an environment in which people are sharing
 12 their ideologies?
 13 **A.** Yes, I think the difficulties are more broadly
 14 associated. You know, what is the limit of rightful
 15 intrusion of the State on somebody in a pre-criminal
 16 space? If you are looking at it, from that end. I know
 17 the other end of looking at it is how do you restrict
 18 access, either through companies themselves or
 19 device-level access, et cetera? So there are a number
 20 of steps in this around how do we, as a society, limit
 21 access to deeply damaging material in the online world?
 22 And that's a big question and I know lots of people are
 23 grappling with -- people much better informed than I --
 24 but I know and I see it in my current role within the
 25 charity as well, the impact that that can have on young

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1 Now, in terms of RIPA and that monitoring -- and
 2 this has been what some Prevent practitioners have cited
 3 for a long time and other law enforcement -- is, to what
 4 extent is doing that, on open-source monitoring, where
 5 you are potentially in breach of RIPA, organisationally,
 6 individually, and in relation to the investigation, if
 7 it is an investigation that you are conducting. And
 8 there is no real strong or clear guidance around that.
 9 I mentioned in my statement, often cited -- may be that
 10 is an overstatement, but certainly cited -- the rule of
 11 three. So if you look more than three times at
 12 somebody's open source, you are therefore -- you should
 13 be going for a RIPA application to do that more than
 14 three times.
 15 It is not based on guidance that I'm aware of.
 16 I think the office have looked previously around: is
 17 this anywhere? Is it in training? I think we found one
 18 reference to it in one local authority's training
 19 package. But it is often cited. I discussed it with
 20 Jonathan Hall. He had heard of it as well. So there is
 21 either a rightly self-limiting belief across law
 22 enforcement or an incorrect self-limiting belief across
 23 law enforcement, as to what extent they are able to
 24 continue looking at somebody's public profile to assess
 25 the extent to which they cause a risk to themselves and

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1 others.
2 **Q.** Thank you. So if the Inquiry were to be thinking,
3 depending on further evidence that will emerge about the
4 idea of open-source intelligence work, I think one of
5 the suggestions that you make is that there should be
6 guidance issued to supplement RIPA?

7 **A.** Yes.

8 **Q.** Do you have a view on who should be issuing that
9 guidance?

10 **A.** No.

11 **Q.** Thank you. We will pick that up with others. I think
12 you have already broadly covered these themes but in
13 relation to the Online Safety Act, you note a link with
14 Prevent Duty Guidance and the idea of permissive
15 environments. So you suggest that you would welcome
16 a strengthening of the Online Safety Act; is that right?

17 **A.** Yes. I was here when the previous witness was touching
18 on this matter earlier. Within Prevent Duty Guidance it
19 talks about permissive environments and what should be
20 done to address those permissive environments in the
21 real world. In summary, in short, action should be
22 taken by local authorities and other partners to stop
23 those permissive environments where radicalising
24 narratives are encouraged, developed and people can go
25 to be radicalised.

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1 cases were frequently associated with online activity.
2 If we could go over the page, please ILT000219_0039.
3 Thank you, and we have the section dealing with FCAMHS,
4 which I will move beyond. Then this:

5 "Limitation in the tools and powers available to
6 assess online indicators of risk.

7 "counter terrorism units were asked whether they had
8 appropriate tools and powers to anxiety and assess
9 online activity for the purposes of identifying and
10 managing risk. Their responses identified three
11 recurring areas of concern, namely the adequacy of
12 existing legal powers, operational capacity and
13 resourcing, and the extent of co-operation from online
14 platforms."

15 Then there is a sensitivity there, which is rightly
16 redacted, but if we could move to the bottom of the
17 page. Then the further analysis, says:

18 "These responses suggest that the challenge
19 identified by CTUs is not confined to a single aspect of
20 online risk assessment. Rather, respondents described a
21 combination of legal, operational and platform-related
22 constraints which may limit the extent to which online
23 activity can be systematically accessed, assessed and
24 addressed in VFI-related cases"

25 Do those responses, those concerns raised, chime

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1 That is manifestly different than what is currently
2 in the Online Safety Act. And the previous witness,
3 Peter, talked about the "awful but lawful", in
4 legislation that change and it was stepped back from.
5 Albeit, we were told today that that may be revisited.
6 So there is a dissonance between what Prevent's guidance
7 is saying should be done in the real world and what is
8 able to be done, potentially, in the online world, which
9 is a significant factor in that pathway of
10 radicalisation, or being drawn into -- vulnerable to
11 terrorism and other harms.

12 **Q.** Thank you. So in this area, I think we have covered the
13 idea of open-source intelligence. That's identifying
14 potential referrals from open-source material, in brief.
15 And thank you for your helpful answer on the Online
16 Safety Act and the ability that you could strengthen the
17 approach for the public more widely. I think there is
18 one other aspect, which is the tools that practitioners
19 have when someone has been referred to them. Can I just
20 pull up, again, the Crest questionnaire. It is
21 ILT000219.

22 Page 39 ILT000219_0039. Actually, if we could start
23 at page 38 ILT000219_0038, and the bottom of that page,
24 please. So, consistent with the evidence you have
25 given, counter terrorism units were reporting that VFI

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1 with your views as Prevent Commissioner?

2 **A.** Yes, and I think that will be a combination of what
3 I have talked about. Those limitations around open
4 access, open source; it will be tools and the changing
5 technology landscape and ability for policing, law
6 enforcement generally, to keep up with that. So it will
7 be a combination of all of those factors as described
8 there. And almost every investigation, almost every
9 Prevent referral and Channel intervention has an online
10 element and practitioners are understandably feeling
11 like they are not where they need to be, collectively.

12 **Q.** Just focusing on a VFI pathway, practitioners working in
13 that pathway would obviously require digital expertise.
14 Do you have a view on where that could feasibly come
15 from? Would CTP be the appropriate body to provide that
16 local policing?

17 **A.** I mean, there are entities within policing and beyond,
18 Counter Terrorism Policing, regional organised crime
19 units, local forces, certainly the big ones have digital
20 capability, online investigation teams. So it is
21 a common challenge for law enforcement but most law
22 enforcement entities have the ability to do something.
23 But I would imagine, and have heard and heard very
24 recently, that they all feel that their capability to do
25 that as well as they would like to do and quickly as

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1 they would like to do, still needs further support and
2 work. And people then get into the world of what can AI
3 do, to help, to kind of scrape and deliver and present
4 in an understandable format, et cetera. So it is
5 a challenge for wider law enforcement, I think,
6 generally.

7 **Q.** Thank you. One point you do make -- and moving on,
8 I think, to the blurred boundary of effectiveness of
9 current laws systems and interventions, is that if
10 inspection of electronic documents became a mandatory
11 part of Prevent -- and again, the Inquiry might draw the
12 analogy with a VFI pathway -- then that might lead to
13 a reduction in consent rates to Channel interventions?

14 **A.** Yes, if it was a kind of automatic consequence that if
15 you consent to Channel interventions, that you have then
16 just authorised the police basically to crawl all over
17 your online and digital devices, I could see that very
18 much having a chilling effect on consent rights.

19 **Q.** Yes. The other idea is that you might have an order
20 that would be used when someone reaches a certain
21 threshold. I think in your statement, it is your
22 paragraph 66 IPC000001_0018, if we could just have that
23 on the page, but I will paraphrase it.

24 You suggest the benefit of using -- you talk about
25 the kind of analogous type orders there are, that we

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1 there was potential, alongside all the other things that
2 are being considered around civil orders separately,
3 et cetera.

4 **Q.** Is it your view then that the family courts would be
5 better placed to make this type of order?

6 **A.** Well, of course, they would only apply to a certain
7 category of people. I'm not suggesting they would be
8 better placed. I think I'm just suggesting it is one
9 potential option that may be explored.

10 **Q.** Thank you. Dealing with interventions more generally,
11 I think you have already told us on of the possibility
12 that intervention providers who list "fascination with
13 violence" as a specialism could be sort of co-opted into
14 a VFI pathway, is that right?

15 **A.** Yes.

16 **Q.** Thank you. Just considering your learning from your
17 Vault Youth Zone role. Are there any other types of
18 interventions for a VFI that you consider would be --
19 that you think are worth considering from -- is there
20 anything you have picked up from that?

21 **A.** I think -- and again I am sure there were people much
22 better placed than I -- but when you look at what are
23 the underlying issues that is driving that behaviour,
24 that's generating that risk, and the Prevent Assessment
25 Framework kind of draws on the available evidence in

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1 have already heard evidence about, like Sexual Harm
2 Prevention Orders. But then on the next page, you talk
3 about adaptation of existing Child Protection and Family
4 Court Orders -- sorry, next page, my mistake. I meant
5 the next paragraph. So 66, still.

6 Existing Child Protection and Family Court Orders.
7 I think that is probably a slightly different viewpoint
8 to one we have heard before. Could you just expand on
9 that?

10 **A.** Yes, I think that within Family Court Orders, within
11 safeguarding practice -- and this sits under parental
12 responsibility rather than deprivation of liberty
13 issues -- the court can grant certain restrictions of
14 an individual who is under care around accessing
15 devices, time of accessing devices, et cetera,
16 et cetera. And it is really: is there anything that can
17 and should be done with that? If you look at the VFI
18 situation, particularly, if that was to move into
19 a wider safeguarding system, that is there anything that
20 can and should be done within that ability for family
21 courts to impose those restrictions?

22 What is important and in all of these is that there
23 is an independent court looking at this and the
24 opportunity to make representations for and against,
25 I think. But it was one area where we thought that

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1 psychology, et cetera, around what are the issues and
2 how do you address those issues, unmet needs, et cetera;
3 there is work to be done around interventions, whether
4 that is within Prevent or outside of Prevent. I know
5 Richard Taylor gave evidence here the other day and
6 I think he referred to some work that they have done
7 with the cohort that had been referred into the Clinical
8 Consultancy Service.

9 He does -- I think, it is around paragraph 97,
10 I think, of his statement -- talk about some further
11 work that's going on with UCL, looking at what those
12 underpinning factors are --

13 **Q.** Just keep your voice up.

14 **A.** -- and, therefore, what their interventions may look
15 like in terms of addressing those concerns. So, that's
16 a very long way of saying, the interventions available
17 currently within Prevent, so those people assessed to be
18 VFIs within Prevent, and those that may not be, there is
19 a lot of work to go, I guess. Then on top of that,
20 Prevent -- and I do point to this in my statement,
21 Prevent has interventions funded by the Home Office and
22 outside systems, at this present moment, don't
23 necessarily.

24 **Q.** Thank you. You touched on the Clinical Consultancy
25 Service. Is that -- again, we talked about concepts of

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1 the generalised prevention pathway and the risk of
 2 having different pathways delivering similar
 3 interventions. Obviously there might be a resourcing
 4 question, but do you see that kind of facility as
 5 something that would be useful for VFIs?

6 **A.** Yes.

7 **MR BOYLE:** Thank you.

8 Mr Jacques, thank you. Those are my questions.
 9 Just before I turn, I just wanted to ask you if there
 10 was anything else you wanted to address?

11 **A.** There is one issue that I don't think I articulated
 12 right at the very beginning when I was talking about the
 13 issue of definitions and potentially threshold tests.
 14 So, vulnerability to being drawn into terrorism is the
 15 kind of legal gateway. Then potentially, I suggest the
 16 question: if not that, is there a vulnerability to be
 17 drawn into extreme or serious violence? What I think --
 18 if that were deemed to have some merit, what that could
 19 then do is be connected in to the serious violence duty
 20 and therefore, there is legislation already in place
 21 that maybe guidance could be changed, maybe that could
 22 be amended, that would enable a duty similar to the
 23 Prevent duty, that is already in existence, that
 24 partners are accustomed to dealing with. There is
 25 variance in what that duty delivers across England and

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1 sure I have properly understood how you are envisaging
 2 this.

3 So, question 1 is: would you be expecting, in this
 4 kind of medium-term solution, that there would only be
 5 one place where referrers would go, which is to this
 6 parallel system, or would you see there still being
 7 an ability for a school master or mistress to go
 8 straight to Prevent because they think that it is
 9 terrorism-related and, similarly, to go straight to
 10 whatever the other body is for those where there's
 11 a risk that they are going to be drawn into acts of
 12 serious violence?

13 **A.** I think in the short-term, yes.

14 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Right.

15 **A.** But I think in either case, the receivers of those
 16 referrals, step two, upon receipt of that referral, they
 17 have a conversation with the other.

18 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Notify the other, right. Then, as that
 19 individual is assessed, you would effectively, would you
 20 not, be doing some kind of joint assessment? Because
 21 you would have somebody from Prevent present at those
 22 meetings and there may be a stage in that assessment
 23 process, either very early on or later, where Prevent
 24 says: look, this is ours.

25 **A.** Yes.

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1 Wales, particularly. But there is a framework
 2 potentially there that could underpin whatever happens
 3 that isn't preventative, that isn't Prevent.

4 **Q.** Thank you, that's helpful. Is this right, the serious
 5 violence duty creates an obligation to create a kind of
 6 strategic response to serious violence but taking it
 7 a step beyond would be to create a kind of operational
 8 process?

9 **A.** Yes.

10 **Q.** Thank you very much. I will turn -- I think it is
 11 Mr Chapman asking questions. I see a shake of the head.
 12 Thank you very much, Mr Jacques.

Questions by SIR ADRIAN FULFORD

14 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Just one thing from me, Mr Jacques.

15 I just want to make sure I have properly understood
 16 something. I think I have; you have been very clear.
 17 So, we will work on the basis that the future scheme of
 18 things, for the sake of argument, as you would prefer to
 19 envisage it, is accepted. So Prevent remains, there is
 20 a continuing mechanism for the FEVMCA category, so that
 21 higher end, to remain within Prevent, so as long as
 22 there is a vulnerability to being drawn into terrorism.

23 **A.** Yes.

24 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** What you have then gone on to describe
 25 is a parallel referral process and I just want to make

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1 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** And hopefully there would be agreement
 2 and it would be siphoned off. Now, my question is, we
 3 have heard a figure of 1,500 individuals being seen as
 4 potentially being in this cohort.

5 **A.** Yes.

6 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Is it, in your judgement, within
 7 Prevent's -- sort of broadly within Prevent's current
 8 resourcing, to be able to put somebody into a joint --
 9 a parallel assessment process, where presence of Prevent
 10 is required?

11 **A.** I couldn't answer that absolutely confidently, in terms
 12 of what the current state is of Prevent resourcing and
 13 other demands on Counter Terrorism Policing's budget.
 14 I think, as a general principle, that can be done and
 15 I think -- you know, does the Prevent professional need
 16 to be sat in that place, wherever that place is? Or are
 17 they sat at their desk within the Counter Terrorism
 18 Policing team, as part of that team and part of that
 19 process to come together when necessary to discuss cases
 20 and the assessment of that case together?

21 It may be that if local policing are in that
 22 process, as I suggest they would be, that -- in those
 23 early stages, that Prevent would have a relationship
 24 with local policing, that gave them confidence that
 25 those early discussions and decisions could be made

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1 without them physically being present.

2 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Right, okay. But that you would have

3 local police officers, sufficiently well informed, to be

4 able to make a reasonably good assessment as to whether

5 this looks like a Prevent case or not?

6 **A.** Yes.

7 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Right. I said there was one question,

8 there's two. I observed, earlier on with another

9 witness, that I very much hoped to be able to conduct

10 the second stage of Southport without having to spend

11 a large amount of time worrying about definitions, such

12 as "VFIs" and "NIEVs" and "NIVEs" and all the rest of

13 it. In what I have certainly taken as a very polite

14 way, I have detected with you that that's an approach

15 that you very much share, in that I think what you would

16 say is: completely forget about this definitional

17 impasse. Instead, just look at whether the individual

18 is at risk of being drawn into serious violent offending

19 and that is the only question that you need to ask?

20 **A.** Yes.

21 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Right, and so you would have Prevent on

22 the one hand, and you would have all of those who fit

23 into that other category on the other. You would have

24 a parallel triaging process, but which leaves, with the

25 second body, fulfilling an element of, as it were, case

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1 management and follow-up through to some kind of end

2 point, to make sure that the individual doesn't get lost

3 during the course of whatever interventions are deemed

4 to be appropriate?

5 **A.** Yes.

6 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** And that, in its most reduced terms, is

7 what you would see the interim stage as looking like?

8 **A.** Yes, sir.

9 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Well, that is extremely helpful

10 Mr Jacques, thank you very much indeed.

11 **A.** Thank you.

12 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** 10 o'clock tomorrow morning?

13 **MR BOYLE:** Sir, yes, we move on to our social care and

14 safeguarding evidence. We have Mr Mark Norris from the

15 Local Government Association.

16 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Excellent. Thank you all very much.

17 We will sit again at 10.00 am tomorrow morning.

18 **(4.25 pm)**

19 **(The Inquiry adjourned until 10.00 am the following day)**

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